

## The Three Minute Leader: ROOM 101

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March 2020

I taught in a central London comprehensive in the 1980s at the height of the IRA's bombing campaigns. The distinguished headteacher told me years later after she had retired that during those years she received by phone daily bomb threats.

She evacuated the 1700 children and 150 staff onto the Westminster streets on some occasions – but not all. Her judgement and nerve thankfully held. That has always counted for me as fearless leadership. Some might not condone her actions, but that would be to misunderstand the times.

There are many contemporary voices who speak and write of *fearless* leadership – running schools without fear of failure. That mindset certainly has its merits.

In George Orwell's novel *1984*, the basement torture chamber in the Ministry of Love is Room 101. In the room, the prisoner is subject to her or his own worst nightmare, fear or phobia.

Fiction of course....but what is most to be feared in school leadership?

Perhaps it is those decisions, having to be taken quickly, which affect all students and staff – and you'll be 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'.

For example, what to do when...?

1. A fifth of the staff, belonging to a particular professional association, say they are joining a two-day national strike.
2. Heavy snow falls during the morning, and a quarter of your students come by bus from neighbouring villages.
3. You receive an anonymous phone call saying school meals have been spiked.
4. There are suddenly two cases of meningitis in the sixth form.
5. A violent intruder is spotted in your school grounds.
6. You are subject to a ransomware attack.

You might in advance, and on the day:

- Rehearse your response to such events with senior colleagues in and beyond your school.
- Run your plans past trusted governors/trustees.
- Draft appropriate email/text/letter communications to students and parents – ready on file.
- Trust in your clear and timely decision, with a clear conscience.
- Read the next page!

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