

## GUEST COLUMN – December 2025

### ZILLIONS

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*This is an extract from the final chapter of 'The A – Z of Primary Leadership'*

'No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.'  
*Dead Poets Society* (1989)

Being a primary school headteacher is a journey unlike any other. It requires that you have zillions of ideas. From teaching and events, to trips and visitors and staff training - *and* know how to fit all of this into a tight budget.

It is a role steeped in joy, laden with challenges and brimming with immense privilege. On a good day it is an adventure filled with opportunities to inspire, guide and nurture the next generation. On a bad day it can be soul-destroying, as it's on you personally to make the many moving parts synchronise and mesh seamlessly.

Having a good team around you is essential: a multifaceted team with complementary skills and experiences who are hard-working and loyal to the cause - that cocktail will ensure success.

Despite the challenges, the role of a primary school headteacher is a profound privilege. The opportunity to shape young minds and influence their futures is a responsibility that carries immense weight and significance. Every decision made, every policy implemented, and every interaction with students has the potential to leave a lasting impact.

The best ensure this is a profoundly positive impact which reverberates for a lifetime. Being a headteacher allows you to be a role model. Your actions, attitudes and values set the tone for the entire school community. Demonstrating qualities such as integrity, resilience and compassion not only inspires students but also instils these values in them. (See the Nolan Principles – the seven principles of public life: Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995).

The privilege of being entrusted with the education and wellbeing of children is immense. Parents place their trust in you to provide a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment for their children.

One international principal tells the story of running a British school in the UAE. When meeting a local parent about some bad behaviour, the parent responded, 'He is your son, mister – we trust you to do what is best.' This trust is a powerful motivator to continually strive for excellence and ensure that every child receives the best possible education.

Who looks after the caregivers? Who supports those supporting everyone else? It's true that leadership can be lonely at times, but successful leaders manage to find a way to cope and even thrive. Strategies include proper delegation across the school, supervision to ensure all feel supported, strong honest relationships that can stand feedback when things start to wobble, and a chair of governors who will listen and support when needed. But most of all you need family and friends to whom you can talk to decompress, distract you and give you perspective on your job. That's right, it's just a job after all.

Ensure your mobile phone is not the most important 'person' at home, on holiday or when you are taking your children out for the day. Creating healthy boundaries around checking emails at home will lessen your family feeling like they never have your full attention.

You are the captain of the ship – set the direction and brief the crew. There will be storms ahead, but together you will overcome any obstacle and go on an amazing journey together.

[\*The A-Z of Primary Leadership\*](#) (John Catt A-Z series)

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