

## CASE STUDY:

### Alison Kriel - Executive Headteacher

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#### Biggest Challenges

When I took over my role as Head Teacher at Northwold Primary School back in February 2008, the school had been through a number of Head Teachers. When the job was presented to me, I was asked to prepare the school for an Ofsted but led to believe that leadership aside, everything was fine at the school.

The school was failing and it was near the bottom of the national league tables; parents, pupils and staff were aware of the school's position. As a result, the self-esteem of the whole community was very fractured and there was little sense of pride within the school. Confidence was so low that teachers had the mind-set that they could not expect much from the children and in turn, the parents had very little trust in the school.

The school was also receiving a huge number of complaints. It really was all very poor. The school's culture at time was also very negative, chaotic even. Staff were not respectful of each other, and in turn the students were not respectful towards the staff or each other. All of this contributed to the very high turnover of the SLT which served only to perpetuate the lack of stability within the school. The school's poor reputation also meant that the school had 125 children spaces unfilled which had a significant impact on funding.

#### Making Changes

I decided things needed to change. For too long I was working hard to meet make what felt like cosmetic changes rather than pursuing my own vision for the school. Viv and her team at Integrity Coaching showed me just how burnt out I was and that I needed to start thinking about what I could do to start making myself better.

I also recognised that if I was burned out, the chances were that my staff were probably feeling the same to some degree or the other. Governors have a responsibility for the well-being of the whole school community so I decided to approach them to ask if we could set a well-being budget. It was a very difficult conversation because the school was still open to negativity, however my governors were great and fully endorsed the idea. We agreed a whole school well-being strategy to support the staff and the school community.

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## Immediate Difference

As soon as we began to implement the budget, it made an immediate difference. On a personal level, Integrity's coaching allowed me to truly appreciate the importance of leading by example and modelling the self-care that I wanted to see in my team.

I began to look after myself more carefully and in doing so, I was able to notice how when I feel better, I'm also able to lead better. As Headship is often about being strong and holding a space for everyone, I found it so valuable being coached by Integrity.

They allowed me to have a safe place to be vulnerable, drop the leadership mask and think things through without judgement. They provided an empowering space where you can be truly yourself, share your aspirations, your concerns and then find solutions that work for you. Having experienced the enormous benefit of coaching, both in terms of my wellbeing and my performance, I realised that I wanted my team to also be supported in this way and so I decided to make coaching a priority in the budget.

## Investing in Well-being Strategies

I meet a lot of School leaders these days and they can see that having a well-being budget makes sense but they are wary that their governors will have reservations about implementing a well-being budget, particularly amidst funding cuts. When they raise these concerns, I now always say to them, "Well, actually... if you want to improve things in your school, this is probably the cheapest thing you can do!"

When I took up this headship in my current school, there was a history of a low staff attendance rate averaging at 64% and a very high budget (approx. £740,000) for supply teachers. As morale has improved so did staff attendance which averaged around 98% when I left. This meant a much-reduced supply budget and the savings offset the cost of the well-being budget.

Above all, prioritising well-being made us a happier school, improved staff performance and played a big role in ensuring that the school was consistently ranked in the London top 10 (which is very rare) and one of the nation's top 100 schools. I would whole heartedly recommend Integrity Coaching to any Head Teacher who is facing situations similar to my own when I first started at Northwold.



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