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Student leadership: theory to reality

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Student leadership: theory to reality

What do we mean by ‘leadership’ in this context?

Giving boys the opportunity:

• to take responsibility for the organisation of events (planning, publicity, financial, logistics, evaluation)
• to be creative in bringing forward initiatives that will be of benefit to the school community
• to act as positive role models for younger students
• to effect real change as the leaders of teams
• to convince others of their ideas through the development of presentation and inter-personal skills
Attitudes

• Define expectations (boys, parents, staff)
• Learning can be a very teacher-centric activity in the classroom. The same teachers who need to be encouraged to ‘let go’ in the classroom, will require convincing that boys should be allowed to lead.
• When students have an idea, we must not take it and implement it. Even if we could do it more quickly, we must insist that they take responsibility.
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Attitudes – some thoughts

• Why would boys want to take the lead if their teachers are prepared to do everything for them?

• Our default response should be ‘yes’.

• We must be prepared to let them get it wrong.
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Structures

- Schools must provide the structures within which student leadership can thrive.
- The School Council (beloved of UK school inspectors) is too tokenistic. We need a more complex web of leadership opportunities.
- We need to devote staff time (and a budget) in order to help boys turn ideas into actions.
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The LGS prefect structure

• Final year students select 15 of their peers to be School Prefects.
• Senior boys put themselves forward for election. They can express an interest in 2 distinct roles from those listed below:
  • There is a Head Boy and 2 Deputies.
  • There are 12 further prefect portfolios:
    • Academic enrichment; Careers; Charities; Co-Curricular; Common Room; Environment; Marketing and External Relations; Music; Social and Food; Sport; Student Mentors; Wellbeing
  • However, we also encouraged boys to create new portfolios.
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The LGS prefect structure

• Headmaster and Head of Sixth Form (Upper School) interview the top 15 to confirm portfolios.

• (We reserve the right to make further appointments if a boy with leadership potential comes to our attention.)

• We have added for Sep 2017, a ‘Spirituality’ Prefect as one of our senior boys made a compelling case for the need to give spirituality a greater profile in our community.
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The LGS leadership structure for senior boys: our concerns

• Only 15 leaders in the school out of 1000 boys??
• Network of sub-committees is the next project. A Prefect will lead a committee of boys taken from each year thinking about their particular area of school life.
  • Environment, Social and Food, Charities, Music have got ahead of the curve and are already operational.
• Considerable need for training of staff to be effective coaches and mentors. Teachers know how to lead a class in its learning, and how to advise an individual student in how to improve his grades. Not all, however, are expert in empowering boys to think for themselves.
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Mentorship

• Teachers to act as leadership mentors: coaching approach
• We must resist the urge to tell our students what to do! We must re-wire our problem-solving brains!
• “How do you think you could ….?”
• “How could you improve on this next time?”
• “What are the pros and cons / opportunities and threats?”
• “How are you going to use the skills and enthusiasms of your team?”
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Preparing for leadership

• What is a leader?
  • School assemblies
  • Year 12 citizenship (PSHE) programme
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Preparing for leadership

• What is a leader?
  • School assemblies
  • Year 12 citizenship (PSHE) programme

• Leadership coaching: we are working with a company in the UK called ‘The Unreasonables’ to help our Y12 and Y13 move away from ‘group-think’.

• Each student leader needs a teacher mentor
• Weekly meeting between Head Boy, Deputies and Headmaster
• Coaching must underpin the student-teacher relationship throughout the school.
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The leadership smörgåsbord

• School Council and committee representatives
• CCF (Combined Cadet Force)
• Voluntary service (primary schools; nursing homes; charity shops)
• Academic mentors
• Peer mentors
• Leadership of subject clubs and societies
• Public speaking and debating
• Buddies to new students
• Sports leadership awards and sports captaincy development programme
• School duties
• Students involved in interviewing staff
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Over to you! What have been your experiences of successful student leadership?