

What heads want

Three primary headteachers tell us what they are looking for when recruiting middle leaders...

*I do not **look** for textbook **answers** but for passion; for that is what will **inspire children** and staff.*



IAIN ERSKINE - headteacher at Fulbridge Primary School, Peterborough

When advertising any post, I always ask candidates to first visit the school and have a look around. I have to say, I have often made my mind up about whether I would employ them within a few minutes. I am impressed by

people who make good eye contact and have a passion and belief in what they are saying.

I will then read the application to see what their strengths are and what they can offer our school. But first and foremost it is the person that matters and whether they will become part of the team. I'm looking for someone who really wants to come to Fulbridge, so their application needs to be personalised to our school; not just a standard letter that is being sent out with every application.

I want to see a real love of the subject come out when they talk about their area of expertise. I like applicants who show off their subject knowledge in a confident but not over-bearing, I know best, manner.

The best candidates have visited our website and researched all they can about the school and its community. They talk to children and staff as they go round the building to see if it suits them. They are not afraid to suggest ideas and will question why we do things in a certain way, but they are excited by the school, what it can offer them and what they can offer it.

*Having a **subject** coordinated by a non-specialist is not **always** a **bad** thing.*



LIZ WEBSTER - headteacher at Aldingbourne Primary School, Chichester

When looking for somebody new to fill the shoes of a

subject coordinator, ideally we would look for someone with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subject, the ability to inspire and motivate colleagues and good organisational skills. The right person would have plenty of ideas about new initiatives and would be excited about what they could bring to the subject.

Sometimes, however, it is impossible to find a subject specialist within your staff, particularly in a small school. For example, not many primary school teachers are design and technology experts. However, having a subject coordinated by a non-specialist is not always a bad thing. Their commitment to lead and desire to improve their subject is the key ingredient to ensuring that their subject area continues to develop. The best leaders are not necessarily the people with the best subject knowledge, but are the people who have the most impact on a subject, by listening to and inspiring staff and sharing ideas.

*If there are two **candidates** neck and neck for the **appointment**, knowing that one has tremendous **desire** for the **job** might just swing it their way.*



KEVIN HARCOTBE - headteacher at Redlands Primary School, Fareham

The head will look for evidence in your application relating to the subject to be led: what you have achieved in your current school? What are your thoughts on developing the subject? What are your views on recent national developments in education? And so on. You need to show that you are - if only potentially - an expert in your field.

At interview, subject knowledge will be tested through questioning and almost certainly through lesson observation. It's stating the obvious, but do something eye catching rather than playing it safe. Remember, you need to be a good general teacher, albeit with clear strengths in your chosen field: it's no good presenting yourself as God's gift to mathematics education if your spelling is rubbish and you can't teach English for toffee.

You also need to present yourself as indefatigable and unflappable. One teacher in her interview lesson observation was having trouble with her memory stick and simply abandoned what she had planned and did an on the spot improvised session. She got the job because the lesson was at least good and she had demonstrated calmness under pressure, the ability to think on her feet and resilience.

A coordinator has to lead a team and inspire them, so you need to tread the fine line between being able to lead but also able to take account of the importance of inclusivity and carrying your team with you rather than leaving them behind or driving them forward with a bullwhip and threats.

