Recruitment and retention of teachers April 2017

I genuinely believe that teachers have an incredibly tough workload. Many people who are entering teaching have no concept of the difficulty of the job and some feel overwhelmed during training or probation. Some teachers get to a stage in their lives when they know that the need to get a good work / life balance is a necessity and realise that it is incredibly hard to achieve.

I left teaching to spend a year in industry, 5 years ago. In this year, I did more training and received more promotions than I had done in my previous 20+ years of teaching. All training was done during my working hours, was paid for by my company and had an immediate impact on my day to day work. Promotions were accompanied by increase in salary and I felt valued. Much training that I have done as a teacher has been something which I would like to take further but due to our constant workload, never get to use it as I would like. My year out also made me realise that many other people can leave their work each day and not think about it until they get back to it the next day. Teachers are often planning including thinking of techniques to address pupil needs etc. Many of us have very minimal training about how best to deal with different pupil needs… but to be honest it is surely impossible, as one person, to meet the many diverse needs of all our pupils in a 50 minute lesson. I feel that I am running to keep my head above water each and every day. Teachers rarely feel valued. There is an expectation that we will cope with all that is thrown at us whether we agree with what it is or not.

I have been teaching in secondary schools for 26 years and can honestly say that these past few years have been the hardest for me. Obviously I am a very experienced teacher but feel ‘snowed under’ by ongoing changes to the curriculum, new initiatives, difficulty finding the most recent documentation from SQA, inclusion etc. A few years ago, I believed myself to be one of a team of inspiring teachers who used AifL strategies and games to engage and excite young people. I am now conscious that I am less confident about what SQA requires of my pupils and constantly feel that what I do is never good enough. Many colleagues have discussed that we could work 24 hours, 7 days a week and still we would not be doing enough!!

When Standard Grade, Revised Higher and Higher Still courses were introduced we all felt that we were trained well. In these days of ‘cascading’ of information, everyone seems to have their own perceptions of what is required from each piece of course evidence. The descriptors are so vague that each person has a different interpretation. It should not be that we are not sure whether we are right or wrong.

The young people are our main concern and we are mainly empathetic and understanding people. This quality is something that I feel is taken advantage of.

Many parents would be surprised at how some pupils behave in class. Many young people and their teachers have to endure this rudeness and lack of respect.
I would be very happy to be one of a team tasked with formulating a plan to improve Scottish Education. I personally believe it is at rock bottom at the moment and, although I once was very proud of our education system, I often wonder whether I should look at teaching other curricula in other countries.

Regards

Susan Rhind