

## My Five Basic Beliefs

I began my headship at Colmers in April 2011. Despite being born and bred in Birmingham, it was the first time that I had worked at a school in my city and inevitably it was fairly daunting to arrive as headteacher in a school where I was a stranger to every student and every single member of staff. Fortunately there is nothing like the passage of time to erase such anxieties and like so many of my current and former colleagues at Colmers, I believe that it only takes a matter of weeks before a newcomer feels like they have been at the school for years.

Arriving at a 'new' school with one thousand young people, 140 staff and thousands of family members, forces any new headteacher to be clear about their core values and beliefs. Whilst everyone wants a newcomer to have a little bit of time to settle in, within days, if not hours, I was forced to make important decisions that affected young people's lives.

Every day there can be dozens of decisions to make; some big decisions and some small decisions. In my very first meeting with my new colleagues I said that mistakes were inevitable but the one thing we could control was our motivation. As long as our motivations are pure then we can forgive one another for mistakes along the way.

That is why, for me at least, having really clear motives, values and beliefs are really important. The privilege of leading a school is not like running a football club. Football is really just an entertainment industry obsessed with profits with only one or two winners and the rest losers. The consequences of winning or losing a game are, in the end, not very important at all. But education is very, very different. Leading a school means that my colleagues and I must have a very clear bunch of motivations, values and beliefs that drive every decision.

### *So, what do I believe?*

**1. I believe that education is the only thing that can really set you free in life.** Children died in the South African township of Soweto because they demanded to be educated. They knew that ignorance leads to hardship and slavery of one form or another. They knew that education leads to liberation, choice, happiness and fulfillment. If I could summarise in one sentence the most difficult part of my job and the most difficult part of any teacher's job, it would be to try and convince a young person that the most important thing in their life ought to be education; learning and passing examinations so that they can open more doors in their life.

**2. I believe that children's behaviour and their attendance partly reflects how they feel about themselves, their education and their future.** I don't defend poor behaviour or poor attendance, but I choose to see these as things that can be improved if the child, their family and the school work together to build that child's self-esteem, self-confidence and expectation of success.



**3. I believe that being poor or disadvantaged makes it harder to be successful at school but it does not make it impossible.** Plenty of evidence exists to show that being economically disadvantaged is more likely to lead to poor outcomes at school. But there are overwhelming examples where this is not the case, where disadvantaged young people overcome the effects of poverty through a determination to take advantage of their school life and lead a different kind of life with greater choices and more opportunities. This is my own experience.



**4. I believe that our intelligence and therefore our futures are not fixed.** History and my own personal experiences of friends, family and students I have taught convinces me that our intelligence isn't determined by our DNA and that with the right kind of education every child can be a much better version of themselves.



**5. I believe that it takes a community to educate a child.** In my experience it is very rare to find a disadvantaged child who surpasses all expectations without having benefitted from loving, supportive and ambitious parents and carers working alongside passionately committed teachers with an affection for their subject and an enjoyment of working with young people

***I am willing to be held to account for these beliefs and be challenged if these words do not appear to match my actions or decisions at all times.***

