

MORE THAN financial management

Just how important is it to employ a School Business Manager? Nigel Mountford, Headteacher at Harwich and Dovercourt High School in Essex, explains what having a SBM has meant for him.

“THE WORK THE SBM DOES IN THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OF ALL THE SUPPORT SERVICES HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON IMPROVING STANDARDS THROUGHOUT A SCHOOL.”

“When I first decided to create the new position of School Business Manager (SBM), I must confess to being a little naïve about the role. I thought the main purpose of the profession was to take the lead on the strategic financial management of a school. As a new Headteacher, the thought of managing a £7million budget was daunting, so I wanted to appoint someone who was better equipped than me to ensure the budget was monitored effectively, we complied with financial regulations and that we achieved value for money on all our spending activities.

“From the outset, I felt it was essential for our new SBM to be an active member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Our first SBM, Justine Berkeley, was appointed in September 2007. Justine has a background as an accountant, which means I rely on her to manage the school’s finances and procurement, but I soon realised that the financial management aspects of the SBM role are only a very small benefit that the post brings to the school. It is the work the SBM does in the strategic leadership of all the support services that opened my eyes to the diversity of the role and the significant impact it can have on improving standards.

“When I first took over as Headteacher in April 2007, the school had just been judged by OFSTED as needing to improve. Justine very quickly implemented new organisational structures, new communication systems, new procedures and policies. This ensured I had a solid platform from which to make all the many changes I needed to address the weaknesses that >



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OFSTED had identified. Together with Justine, I redesigned our staffing structure and prepared business cases explaining our rationale which I could then present to Governors, unions and staff. Justine took the lead or supported me in managing the many changes that we made.

“The next area that was addressed by Justine was the facilities. The school was built in 1950 and was in desperate need of repair and redecoration. Following her review of the staffing structure, Justine saw the need for a team of middle managers to lead on each of the support functions which included a Facilities Manager. Together, Justine and the Facilities Manager have ensured that the premises have had the investment that they needed.

“Five years on, every aspect of the school has been revamped and a rolling programme of asset management and redecoration is in place.

This sends a positive message to the school community who can see the school improving – coupled with the rebranding of the school which includes a new logo, name and uniform policy. These changes have significantly raised the profile of the school and enhanced its reputation.

“The role of the SBM is as diverse as that of Headteacher. Justine’s responsibility for the support functions means I can focus on the core business of teaching and learning. Employing a SBM brings a whole new dimension and different skills mix to school leadership and I would certainly not want to run a school without one.” ■

Justine Berkeley has been a member of NASBM’s Advisory Council (Eastern Region) since 2009 and is a Specialist Leader of Education.

INFO



Harwich and Dovercourt High School in Essex is an academy convertor with 1,200 students and 180 staff.

Following a procurement review of the contracts of all suppliers of goods and services, average savings of £60,000 per annum have been found.