

# LEADING THE WAY



School leaders are responsible for addressing the greatest needs within their school. But what is the role of leaders in relation to the fundraising required to meet so many of these needs, asks the IDPE's **Louise Bennett**

**A**fter the past couple of years, it would be understandable if school leaders put fundraising to one side. Yet in many ways, Covid has created needs that weren't there before – from the widening gap in educational attainment, to the increasing number of pupils struggling with mental health issues. In fact, evidence suggests that heads who spend just 5% of their time on fundraising and engagement can make a huge difference. Here's why:

## Vision

School leaders shape the vision and strategic plan of their school. Having a long-term plan in place is essential to fundraising success. You cannot ask for money without something to raise money for: your case for support (see FundEd spring issue). Rather than run ad hoc fundraising activities, state schools need to cultivate a community of potential donors able and willing to invest in pupils' futures in a more sustained way.

However, it takes time to build relationships with potential donors. Moreover, project which requires significant levels of investment, such as upgrading or building new facilities, will also require lead-in time to encourage donors to give. School leaders need to recognise the importance of establishing this long-term vision, and must share their plans with their community to make the vision a reality.

## An engaged leadership

In schools that are just setting up a development function, it is likely that the head, potentially with other senior staff or governors, will be responsible for delivering fundraising. Even in schools with a dedicated fundraising role (whether full or part-time), the support of school leaders will remain essential in sharing the school's vision and asking and thanking donors. Indeed, according to research from the Institute of Development Professionals in Education (IDPE) on fundraising across both independent and state sectors, schools where the head spent at least 5% of their time on development activities secured three times the average gift size compared with schools where the head spent less time\*.

## Developing relationships

Fundraising success doesn't happen overnight. The IDPE's most recent benchmarking survey suggests that in the first three years, the return on investment from fundraising can be slow (on average 0.4 to 1.2%). However, this grows significantly to 4.3% in years four to six, with sustained investment.

This is because development isn't just about the money. It's about building relationships, inspiring your school community to believe they can make a difference, and helping them to do it. By building meaningful relationships, there is the opportunity that your supporters will not only give, but potentially give more, again and again.

## Make fundraising part of school life

Development is a team sport. Every member of staff has access to a network of potential supporters, and sharing these networks can significantly grow engagement across the school community. Headteachers can support the development officer by encouraging fundraising to be 'seen' and 'heard' across the school. Equally, fundraisers must commit not only to building relationships with external stakeholders but getting to know colleagues across the school and understanding how they can support them.

\* From the IDPE and Graham-Pelton's Schools' Fundraising And Engagement Benchmarking Report 2018.





## HOW STRONG LEADERSHIP ON FUNDRAISING HAS PAID OFF

The development team at **Dr Challoner's Grammar School** in Amersham was established just over a decade ago and, for headmaster David Atkinson, managing expectations has been key. 'You can't expect things to happen immediately. Look to reap the awards over five years or more, rather than trying to run before you can walk. It's vital for the whole school to have a clear purpose and ethos regarding development and fundraising, and to communicate this effectively to parents, alumni and other stakeholders.'

The school set up an Annual Fund to support small but important short-term projects. The growth of

this fund has allowed money to be channelled towards larger capital campaigns, and, when necessary, the cash flow of the 1,300 pupil academy too. This year, monies will be used to refurbish toilets – an unglamorous but necessary project.

In 2024, the school will celebrate its 400th anniversary, a landmark event that fundraising activities can be built around. Preparations for the anniversary started in 2016, with an initial plan developed by the headmaster, resources director and development director. 'We've been working on ways to engage all parts of our community during the anniversary year, including celebratory events, reunions and, of course, a major fundraising campaign to create a fitting legacy for such a milestone,' says development director Clare Atkinson. 'We are currently running focus groups to engage different segments of our community. This will help shape our fundraising plans and serve as the first part of a gift solicitation process. Engaging potential major donors from the outset gives them a greater sense of ownership of the vision – and they are therefore more likely to support us in making it a reality.'

Teamwork on development is evident at Dr Challoner's, where Clare reports to the resources director – another

senior leader who can discuss challenges and share key updates. This means that the time the head spends on development can be focused on adding value, from sharing the school's vision, to asking and thanking donors. This joined-up approach has opened up further opportunities. For instance, Clare was aware of the significant costs in hiring coaches to transport students to sports fixtures, so when a parent asked how they could support the school, she persuaded the parent to donate the full cost of a new minibus. This wasn't part of their annual fundraising plan, but Clare's knowledge of the bigger picture meant she could take advantage of the opportunity.

She has also been able to make fundraising part of school life through her additional roles. She is the school's data protection officer, gets involved in music activities, covers lessons, accompanies school trips and supports enrichment activities. This has enabled her to build good relationships with staff across the school. She is advising Year 13 students on their 'legacy project' and helping them with the collection of monies and administration of their fund. 'Being visible and building relationships with staff and students has been hugely beneficial,' she says. 'Students are the next generation of alumni, and they know me so there is already an element of trust.'

