

# How to monitor and support headteacher wellbeing

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School types: All - School phases: All

As a chair, be clear on how you can monitor your headteacher's wellbeing and make sure they feel supported – both during coronavirus and beyond.

## Contents

- > [Coronavirus: what you can do right now](#)
- > [Have regular meetings with your headteacher](#)
- > [Check how they're coping](#)
- > [Spot the signs that your headteacher needs help](#)
- > [Know where to get further support for your headteacher](#)

Our associate education experts Keith Clover and Pete Crockett helped us with this article.

## Coronavirus: what you can do right now

The wellbeing measures you have in place when it's 'business as usual' still apply now (see the sections below for advice on those). But during coronavirus, there are some particular things to bear in mind:

### Maintain regular virtual meetings with your headteacher

It's likely you're doing this already, but you need to keep on top of your regular catch-ups with your headteacher to see how they're doing.

Your headteacher is likely to be busy and stressed right now, so you might feel like you're bothering them, but try not to worry about this – you want to make sure they're doing ok and have the support they need, so these meetings are still important.

### Continue to ask questions

When you're catching up, ask:

- How are you doing?
- Do you have any concerns about the school right now?
  - E.g. in light of local/national lockdown, or when your school opens up to more pupils
- What problems are you facing right now?
- What can I do to help you solve these problems?

For more questions you can ask, see the section 'Check how they're coping' below.

### Help them manage their workload

You could do a short 'KISS' exercise with your headteacher to check how they're doing:

- Keep – what's working well for their workload?
- Improve – what workload issues do they have and how could they improve them?
- Stop – what can be stopped permanently or in the short term to assist workload?
- Start – what can they start doing to improve their workload?

### Focus on what's important: the wellbeing of the whole school community, including your headteacher

As a board, your key focus should be: 'Are we doing all we can to keep our school community safe, healthy and emotionally well?'

So, in terms of what you're asking of your headteacher right now, don't be scared to ditch some tasks or activities that aren't crucial. For example, could the headteacher's report be scaled back a bit? Do you need the headteacher at every board meeting?

### Make sure they have time off

Normally you wouldn't need to consider this, but coronavirus has disrupted school holidays this year. Your headteacher is going to need a break.

You might need to be insistent with your headteacher about taking a break – you have a duty of care and it's important they can relax and recharge.

Some options:

- If your school is asked to open during holidays, make sure your headteacher puts a senior team 'on call rota' in place, so everyone has time to unwind
- You could consider time off in lieu – but you'd need to consult your local authority or trust HR team to check the practicalities and whether this is possible
- Talk to your local authority or trust about time off for your headteacher – they may have some other options

In all cases, make sure there's a contingency plan in place – your deputy headteacher should be ready to step up when needed, whether this be for headteacher sickness or leave.

The following sections reflect the kinds of things you'll be doing when it's 'business as usual', but the advice still applies during this time.

## Have regular meetings with your headteacher

Ideally, at the beginning of the academic year you'll have:

- **Decided how you'll communicate**
  - Phone, email, video conferencing – whatever you and your headteacher choose should be tailored to how your headteacher works best
- **Set a schedule**
  - This'll be based on when your headteacher would prefer to be contacted, including time of day and how often. Try and establish the same weekly/fortnightly slot, so you're both clear on what's expected and no one feels overloaded
  - Have wellbeing as an agenda item in your meetings with the headteacher, but you'll talk about other things too. Find out what else you might cover and how to make your meetings productive [here](#)

If you haven't agreed on these points yet, don't worry – just agree with your headteacher how you'll have regular catch-ups going forward.

## Check how they're coping

During your regular catch-ups, use our questions and audit below to help you check in with your headteacher:

**Questions to ask** ▼

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**Audit for potential stressors** ▼

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## Spot the signs that your headteacher needs help

Having a strong relationship with your headteacher can help you spot the signs that they need additional support.

Some common signs of stress include:

- Changes in behaviour, mood or how they interact with you or their colleagues
- Changes in the standard of their work or their focus on tasks, such as:
  - No longer sharing information
  - Not meeting deadlines
  - No longer having catch-ups
- Appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn
- Increase in sickness absence

This is outlined in [this Acas article](#).

### Be direct

If you're not sure if your headteacher's ok, ask them:

- How are you?
- How are you being supported by senior leaders or fellow headteachers?
- What can I do to support you further?
- Do you need extra support? Do you know where you can go to get this?

Make it clear you're there for them, and that they're free to talk whenever they need to.

### Stay strategic!

Don't offer to take on any operational tasks – this can muddy the water and it's not your role. Practical changes you can offer can include:

- Making sure you handle communications with the rest of the governing board – that way the headteacher only needs to update you
- Reviewing the times of governing board meetings
- Reviewing how many headteacher reports you receive
- Making sure the headteacher isn't doing any governing board jobs like setting agendas or writing minutes

## Know where to get further support for your headteacher

You're not expected to become a professional counsellor, so make sure you know where to signpost your headteacher to further support if they're struggling.

### Check what support is available from your LA and/or trust

Your LA might have dedicated support networks for headteachers – this can be a great way for your headteacher to talk to other heads about what they're going through.

Your LA may also know of other local networks near you.

Similarly, if you're in a multi-academy trust, your trust may have networks or other support mechanisms you could point your headteacher to.

### Consider hiring a coach for your headteacher to talk to

1 to 1 confidential meetings between your headteacher and an external coach can help your headteacher talk about stress points they have.

Ideally, this person should have past school leadership experience and be external to your school management so they can empathise and offer support to your headteacher.

### Wider networks

Your headteacher's GP would be a great first port of call for them to access help.

There are also organisations you can signpost your headteacher to:

- [Mind](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Together](#)
- [BACP Find a Therapist Directory](#)

This list is by no means exhaustive but should give you some good starting points.

## Sources

Keith Clover is a national leader of governance. He chairs two governing bodies within a multi-academy trust and is an academy consultant for a diocese.

Pete Crockett is a retired special school headteacher who, prior to that, worked as a senior leader and SENCO in mainstream education. He has extensive governor experience, having served on governing boards as a staff, headteacher and co-opted governor. He has particular expertise in SEND, school leadership support and governance.

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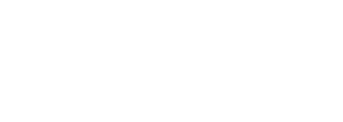
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