

Case study 2: Relationship with the headteacher

11/23

St Andrew's Special School, Derby

Richard Betts has been chair of governors at St Andrew's Special School in Derby since 2004. St Andrew's is a mixed day and residential school for young people aged 11–19 years with severe learning difficulties. In 2012, it became a national support school (NSS) and the headteacher a national leader of education (NLE). In 2013, it became a national teaching school and chose to operate this as part of an alliance of five outstanding local schools, known as the Derby Teaching School Alliance. Its latest Ofsted inspection judged it to be outstanding for both education and residential provision. The executive headteacher is Phil Harrison.

Richard says: "I have a very strong relationship with Phil, who I appointed in 2007 on the retirement of the previous head. We share the same vision and ambitions for the school, always looking for new opportunities to extend and improve what we do and work with others. Our most recent development is a move into post-19 education, in collaboration with Derby College and Derby City Council.

"Our relationship is open, honest, frank and supportive. There is a high level of trust between us, which is important when we are exploring new ideas and developing new provision. I believe my role is to offer counsel, guidance and support, allowing Phil to be innovative and, at times, take risks.

"When he was first appointed I spent more time with Phil, but our relationship has evolved over the years and, although we still meet regularly, we are also in frequent contact by phone, texts and emails. It is very much a relationship of equals, based on mutual respect. Working together, we have always been very clear about our respective roles and also the boundaries: for example I am careful never to be operational or interfere in the day-to-day running of the school.

"We balance each other well and have complementary skills. With my private sector background – I have worked for Rolls-Royce since 1990 in a range of roles around HR and communications – I bring something else to the party, different skills and a different perspective. Phil is very good at reaching out to people to get multi-agency partners on board and he has very good relationships with all our stakeholders. My contribution is to be more evaluative and analytical, challenging and supporting in equal measure.

"A key feature of our relationship is a rigorous appraisal process. [As governors] we set robust and challenging objectives for Phil, which we review regularly. Phil and I see this very much as our opportunity for reflection and review, but also for governors, the process is a means of holding the headteacher to account.

"The strong working relationship between Phil and me sets the ethos for the way in which staff and governors work throughout the school. We talk through everything, always aiming to reach a consensus. And the governing body works in the same way. I very much believe that our strong partnership has enabled our school to be the outstanding and dynamic school it is today."