

The Work of a Primary School Head Teacher

A Head Teacher is responsible to the Provincial Education Officer and assumes overall responsibility over all matters relating to professional and administrative developments and well-being of their school (staff, pupils, buildings and grounds).

This responsibility requires performance of many tasks including:-

1. Teaching commitment and supervision in accordance with approved timetables and syllabuses.
2. Checking, assisting and advising staff on classroom organization, timetabling and teaching methods.
3. Developing good staff relationships through regular meetings and other form of consultation.
4. Delegating responsibilities to teaching staff as needed.
5. Attending to all official correspondence and ensuring that all official letters, documents, circulars and reports are brought to the notice of teachers, when appropriate, then properly filed and stored.
6. Ensuring that the visitors book, log book, staff register, student enrolment register, class lists etc are kept up to date and in good order.
7. Keeping school statistics up to date and completing and returning requests for information promptly.
8. Assisting in the preparation and conduct of national examinations and tests.
9. Assuming responsibility for ordering, in good time, all school materials and ensuring that they are fairly distributed.
10. Keeping and maintaining an inventory of school stock, including furniture, equipment and other assets and exercising control over distribution of these to members of staff and to pupils.
11. Developing good relations between the school and the community. This includes the building of strong links with parents through regular meetings like open-days, parents-evenings, etc.
12. Acting as secretary to the School Committee.
13. Developing with all interested parties long term plans for the school. Planning and budgeting for the school.
14. Being responsible for members of staff and supporting them fully in their contact with the community.
15. Maintaining the school buildings and grounds in good order and ensuring a high standard of hygiene and general cleanliness.
16. Co-operating fully with the work of the Provincial Education Officer and Inspectors.

17. Performing any other duties which might be required from time to time by either the Provincial Education Office or the Ministry of Education.

Non-teaching Heads have the following extra responsibilities:-

18. Carrying out in-class supervision in all classes covering at least ten school hours every week.
19. Acting as relief teacher as and when required.
20. Conduct school-based workshops.

To ensure that pupils are getting the very best education possible, the Head Teacher has important duties in:-

- ◆ Dealing with the teachers
- ◆ Dealing with pupils
- ◆ Dealing with parents and the community
- ◆ Managing the administration of the school

Dealing with the teachers

The Head Teacher must see that teachers are doing their jobs properly. The Head must make sure that teachers come to school on time each day and that they are always in their classrooms when they are supposed to be teaching. Sometimes teachers leave their classroom to go and talk with a friend or to smoke a cigarette. This is bad for the education of the pupils and the Head Teacher must tell such teachers to stay in their classrooms until the bell rings at the end of the lesson. Sometimes, when the class has written work to complete, the teacher may be able to do their own work at their desk for a few minutes. Most of the time, though, a teacher should mark books and prepare lessons after school hours or during a free period. A teacher will always have enough to do during class-time if he or she is trying to teach the best lessons they possibly can.

It is the duty of the Head Teacher to ensure that teachers prepare their lessons properly. The Head should ask to see the preparation books and visit a class to see if a lesson is being well taught. But the Head Teacher must be more than an inspector or supervisor. If a teacher is new to the school or is untrained and does not know how to prepare good lessons, then the Head must help him or her. The Head Teacher could prepare a few lessons for the teacher and perhaps even teach those lessons in order to show the new teacher the best way to do it. The Head must remember that other teachers on the staff will expect the Head to be a very good teacher. The Head should know from experience what kind of help and advice to offer to new teachers.

The Head must make sure that teachers are marking the children's books properly and regularly. This is especially important for mathematics work. Maths work should be marked, if possible on the same day so that children can try and correct their work while it is still fresh in their minds. If pupils have not understood the work it is the teacher's duty to go over the work again. Sometimes a teacher might not mark a child's work for several days - or not at all! Or, perhaps the teacher marks the work but does not insist that it is corrected. Perhaps a teacher will become impatient with a child who finds things difficult

be made responsible for pointing out to the Head the need for repairs, or for checking attendance, or other jobs.

A teacher trusted by the Head in this way is not helping only the Head but is also learning some of the skills necessary to become a Head himself or herself one day. If a Head Teacher is absent or becomes ill, this assistant teacher can sometimes be relied upon to keep the school running smoothly until the Head is able to return. Heads should discuss these extra responsibilities with staff and, particularly if a Head knows he or she is going to be away from school, the staff should be involved in choosing the Head's temporary deputy. Such a deputy can keep the school running in the Head's absence, but may not introduce big changes or make any serious alteration to the school's routines.

In Summary:

1. The Head must see that teachers come to work on time, that they are in their classrooms when they should be and that they do not waste their time during lessons.
2. The Head must make sure that teachers know how to prepare their lessons and teach them properly.
3. The Head should make sure that work is being marked regularly and properly.
4. The Head must make sure that the teachers are following the syllabus laid down by the Ministry of Education.
5. The Head and the teaching staff together are responsible for discipline and behaviour of the children in school.
6. The Head must choose suitable members of staff to do extra work for the school.

Dealing with the pupils

A Head is an example to both teachers and pupils. Pupils will learn to act and speak in the same way as their teachers. Pupils look to the Head Teacher as their leader. If it is all right for the Head to do something, then pupils will feel it is all right for them to do the same thing. Children will copy their leaders so the Head should remember that all the children are watching what he or she does both in and after school. If the Head wants pupils to learn good habits then the Head must make sure that his or her own habits are good. If a Head comes to school late, or is not seen to be busy during the school-day, or if he spends every evening drinking kava and does little work the next day, then the children will get the idea that school work is not important. The Head is the leader of the school. The Head cannot be a good leader unless assistant teachers, pupils, school committee and the village community trust and respect him or her.

People do not respect Head Teachers just because of their positions or because they talk well. If a Head says one thing but then does another, neither the teachers nor the pupils will pay much attention. If a Head tells the school that the school must be kept tidy, but their own office or classroom is not tidy, they can expect little support.

Heads must remember that some things can be done outside school hours but never inside the classroom. Smoking and drinking alcohol might be permissible outside the school but not at school where children can be influenced. During school hours Heads should always do their best to set the very highest of examples of both work and behaviour. Outside school as well Heads should set a good example to the community. They should deal fairly with the village community, settle their local bills promptly and be seen to be honest when handling money. They should avoid bad or dangerous habits like gambling. Heads should always remember that they teach their pupils not only by what they say but also by what they do.

A good Head will set a good example by not spitting or smoking in the school grounds. The Head should always wear clean clothes and his or her house should always be clean and tidy. The Head should have their own latrine and a safe place to throw away waste food or other dirty things. If the Head has pigs or hens they should not allow them to roam around the school area. As mentioned before, children will always follow the example of the Head and the other teachers so it is important to remember that the example set should always be a good one.

It is good practice to try to get to know all the pupils in his school. The Head should learn their names, something about their families and something about their individual abilities. In this way the Head will know whether pupils are doing the best work that they can. If they are lazy he can encourage them to do better. If the Head knows them well, he or she will be able to discuss their difficulties with the class-teacher.

Heads should look out for signs of natural leadership in pupils, by watching who takes the lead in class and on the sports-field. The best leader may not be the cleverest pupil nor the most skillful on the sports-field. Strong leaders can help a Head to maintain the kind of behaviour expected in the school. The Head can appoint monitors or prefects or sports-captains if they wish. These are all ways to involve pupils in the life of the school. Pupils should feel that the school belongs to them.

It is important for a Head to treat all pupils fairly and avoid creating 'favourites' who receive better treatment than others. Heads should not treat children as their 'servants'. It is wrong, for instance, to insist that children should wash the Head's clothes or, worse, chew his kava for him! If a Head has their own children at school, they should treat them in the same way as other children. In one school, a child belonging to the Head was allowed to run around the classroom as he pleased, generally making a nuisance of himself. In a case like that the child is learning very little and the same will be true of the other children who are being constantly disturbed. Another problem to avoid is allowing small children, below school age, to enter classrooms where their parents are teachers. This is disruptive to both teacher and pupils.

Together with the other teachers, the Head should try to watch out for children who may have physical difficulties but are unaware of them. Sometimes children do not realise that they have poor eyesight or poor hearing. Sometimes a child may have a sickness, or may not be eating or sleeping properly. Sometimes such children are unfairly blamed for being lazy or not very bright. Head Teachers can help families by pointing out to parents the symptoms they see in a child during the school day.

Schools Where Children Are Boarders

A Head Teacher in a school where there are children who are boarders has many extra duties and responsibilities. The Head must make sure that pupils have a safe and dry

place to sleep, that the children keep their sleeping and eating quarters clean. A wise Head will lay down strict rules about the use of fire for cooking.

Perhaps most important of all, the Head must do everything to ensure that the children have enough to eat. The Head should try to ensure that children have a balanced diet where possible. This means that they should eat a variety of food including meat, fish and different vegetables. Heads should encourage children who may have money to spend to buy nutritious foods and not waste money on 'junk' food like sweets and crisps.

In Summary:

1. The Head Teacher must be an example for teachers and pupils, not only in school but outside of school.
2. The Head should try to know all pupils personally.
3. The Head should know who are the best teachers in each class.
4. The Head should treat all pupils fairly and in the same way.
5. The Head should try to help those pupils who may have physical difficulties.
6. Where the school has boarders, the Head should ensure that pupils have a safe place to sleep and that they have proper food.

Dealing with parents and the community

The Head Teacher has a duty to parents to take care of their children for a large part of the day and a large part of their lives. In law, teachers are said to be 'in loco parentis' which means that they should act with the same care towards children as if the children were their own.

Good habits of character are best learned in childhood. With this in mind, the Head should try to make their school a training-ground for good citizenship as well as a place of learning. The Head should make sure staff do more than just teach things from books. Children should be taught to act properly, to learn to obey, to be fair when playing with other children, and to be honest and kind. School is very much a place for character training but this is not a subject that will be found on the time-table. It is developed in play, in work and in study. Parents, the Head and staff all have a part to play in helping children to grow up in the best possible way.

The Head Teacher should get to know the parents, so he or she can understand the pupils. If a pupil behaves badly or is a poor attendee at school, the Head should be able to talk to the parents. Together they can try to change the pupil's attitude and make them a better person.

The Head Teacher should be a leader in their village or town, but a Head cannot claim leadership just by showing off their educational achievements or giving orders. A good leader has to be capable of doing themselves all the things they ask others to do for them. The Head must always try to take part in village life. If there is work to be done to build a new road, a school vegetable garden, or a football field, he or she must help. Sometimes a Head Teacher might feel they are too important to do physical work around the village and prefer to sit at school giving orders rather than getting their hands dirty. People will not have faith in such a person and will feel that he or she does not belong to them.

If, on the other hand, a Head Teacher shows that they are willing to work hard with oth villagers and do their share of the work, people will begin to ask their advice - especial if they have some good ideas. They will ask the Head to help and tell them what to do. The Head will begin to be trusted and respected and will be looked upon as a leader. Heads will do well to remember that leadership has to be earned.

A Head Teacher may find that they have received a very good education compared with the rest of the villagers. Even if this is so, the Head should be careful never to boast abc it. If he or she is friendly and helpful, honest and well behaved, they will become a lead in the village as well as in school.

During the school day, Heads should try to ensure that the school is not disrupted by villagers visiting the school compound for reasons which have nothing to do with the ordinary life of the school. The Head should seek the help of the School Committee visitors to the school, who have private business with teachers, become a problem. All visitors should report to the head in the first instance.

The School Committee

The school committee can help the school by:-

- a) Taking an interest in the work of the school and of the individual teachers.
- b) Finding local people who can offer help with weaving, carving, local customs and so on.
- c) Making sure that fees are paid (if there are fees) and that children do not suffer if fees become a problem to the family. Remission of fees may be possible, but Heads should consult their PEO for guidance on this since there may be a national policy to ensure fairness.
- d) Raising funds to help to keep the school, its furniture and its housing for teachers in good repair.

See the Procedure "Guidelines for Community Involvement and School Committees" in the Appendix for more details.

School committees should try to resolve any disputes concerning the school and the local community. Where this is not possible, Heads should report matters to their PEO

The first duty of the committee is to help the teachers at the school to do a good job. The committee must not, however, interfere with a teacher's professional duties.

In Summary:

1. The Head Teacher must try to train pupils' character.
2. The Head should try to get to know pupils' parents.
3. The Head should be friendly and helpful to members of the local community, and participate in the community work for the school.
4. Heads should guard against visitors coming into school on private business.
5. The Head should play a strong role in ensuring the School Committee is effective.

Managing the administration of the school

The Head Teacher is responsible for the good management of the school. Office work should be done in a professional way and correspondence and required official documents always kept up to date.

The basics of good administration are:

- Organising the school office for best efficiency;
- Ensuring everyone at the school keeps the official hours;
- Planning and budgeting for the school every year and sticking to it accordingly;
- Maintaining the school inventory;
- Arranging regular maintenance;
- Working closely with community, government departments and non-government organisations to develop the school;
- Ensuring a high standard of performance from staff;
- Monitor effectively the children's academic achievement.

Many of the administrative routines for schools have now been written down as Procedures in the Appendix of this Head Teachers handbook. Please refer to them for the details.