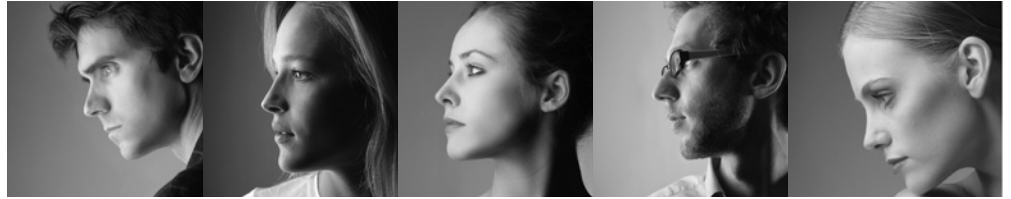




There are a lot of unsung heroes in our society. One profession that too often goes without the praise it deserves is head teachers, *Emma Gaffney* writes



IN PROFILE...

Liz Elam

Liz Elam is committed to making sure everyone gets the best education and chances they deserve in life. She has been dedicating herself to teaching the next generation for 17 years and is now the head teacher for Abbey College in Manchester.

“It’s a hugely different role from being a teacher,” explains Liz. “You’re managing the whole of the college’s budget and the student recruitment. It’s all about working with your staff and students to run the best institution possible.

“I do still teach. I teach a few lessons a week but a lot of my job is about developing the staff and the college culture and managing all the changes that are thrown at you and education from outside of the college.”

And there certainly are a lot of things to keep head teachers on their toes, whether it’s political changes to education or the introduction of new technologies.

“Students aren’t the same now as they used to be,” claims Liz. But it’s clear the qualities good teachers need to possess haven’t changed too much. “You’ve got to be flexible and open to different ideas. It’s about building students’ confidence and skills.”

“You have to have targets that are achievable and praise students when they reach them. And, importantly, you have to make learning fun and work on their level.”

Getting the best grades you can is an important part of education but it’s not the only element of school. Education is also about growing as person.

“I do think it’s very important that we develop the community as well by having shared visions and goals. Abbey College is quite small so everyone knows each other’s names. It’s a nice environment where everyone can support each other.

“We have a motto at Abbey College which is ‘achieving success together’. And what we’re saying is we want to work as a team with the students, the parents and the teachers to move the students forward and guide them.

“I think students make mistakes and they’ll make them again but gradually they make them less and you get them to a place where they become more independent and on the stepping stones to life after school.”

The media was full of stories this summer about the high level of competition to get into universities and Liz has seen the competition firsthand.

“There are lots of students who get good enough grades. But you need to have a good profile in terms of enrichment activities and have all the volunteering and work experience needed to stand out.”

It takes an impressive type of person to passionately take responsibility for the education of others and Liz is certainly one of them with over 90 per cent of her students getting on to their first choice course this year.

“I think it’s a very exciting and innovative environment to be in and ultimately my goal is that every individual deserves the best education they can because that is the key to the future and moving people forward.” ■

