

## GUEST COLUMN – January 2025

### Ambition Harry Hudson

Ambition is a funny word in the English language.

While on the one hand we encourage children to be ambitious – we plaster school corridors and classroom walls with messages like ‘you can do anything’, ‘be what you want to be’, ‘reach for the stars’, ‘just do it’ – as a nation we have an undoubted tendency to sniff out overweening ambition wherever it occurs, be it in our colleagues, friends or politicians, and then proceed to mistrust them for it.

Yet in teaching there’s nothing inherently wrong with being ambitious or having a clearly defined ambition – far from it. On the contrary, in our profession some degree of ambition is essential. We should be ambitious for precisely the same reasons that we encourage our pupils to be ambitious, namely because it’s likely to make us better teachers, just as we hope that encouraging our pupils to be ambitious will make them better pupils.

Having some degree of ambition is likely to make us push ourselves to become better at what we do and more motivated to achieve as highly as we can. Being around ambitious people, and having a healthy degree of competition with our peers, can help us set our own sights higher.

To be an ambitious teacher is not synonymous with seeking glory or riches or fame. It doesn’t even have to mean the desire get promoted. Indeed, the public service ethos so intrinsic to teaching often mitigates against the same motivations that drive those in business, politics or sport, and that, as a result, have come to define the concept of ambition in the popular consciousness.

What does it mean, then, to be ambitious in teaching? Beyond the obvious guiding ambition that should be common to all involved in schools – to achieve the best possible outcome for all pupils – part of the beauty of teaching is that ambition can otherwise mean completely different things to different people.

It means having goals that are achievable but challenging. It’s about knowing what you want to have achieved by the end of the week, over the course of the next term or year, and in 5 or 10 years’ time. Here are some of the things that ECTs would often cite as being their ambitions, a number of which, obviously, would be more relevant for a longer time frame than others:

- To become confident in the routines of a new school.
- To learn how to apply the behaviour policy of a new school.
- To establish a good relationship with all your classes.
- To learn the names of all your pupils.
- To establish a good relationship with a particularly tricky pupil (maybe one with whom you’ve struggled before).

- To improve a particular aspect of your teaching (e.g. explanations, entry or exit routines, giving feedback, clarity of instructions).
- To feel confident in teaching a new topic, scheme of work or syllabus.
- To take responsibility for a new extra-curricular club.
- To gain a deeper understanding of different types of SEND and implement that in your practice.
- To take the lead in running a trip for the first time.
- To improve the efficiency of your marking.
- To achieve results in your exam classes above or in line with pupils' predicted grades.
- To become subject coordinator, head of department or head of year.
- To become a senior leader.
- To become a headteacher.

So, before the school year starts, towards the end of a holiday or even just on the journey to or from work one day, take the time to think explicitly about what your ambitions are. What does success look like to you, in the short-, medium- and long-term? If you've just taken up a new post at a new school – maybe it's your first job in teaching – your short-term ambition may simply be to settle in.

But whatever the case, having a clear sense of ambition not only makes you more likely to work to achieve it, but it also gives you a sense of satisfaction when it is achieved.

**This is an extract from the opening chapter of [\*The A-Z of Early Career Teaching\*](#), published this month by John Catt/Hachette Learning.**