



Department  
for Education

# **National standards of excellence for headteachers**

**Departmental advice for headteachers,  
governing boards and aspiring  
headteachers**

**January 2015**

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# Summary

## About this departmental advice

This is departmental advice from the Department for Education. This advice is non-statutory, and has been produced for headteachers, governing bodies and aspiring headteachers.

## Review date

This advice will next be reviewed by 2020.

## Who is this advice for?

This guidance is for:

- Headteachers and aspiring headteachers
- Governing boards

## Main point

These standards replace the National Standards for Headteachers 2004.

# National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (2015)

## Purpose

The *National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers* (2014) define high standards which are applicable to all headteacher roles within a self-improving school system. These standards are designed to inspire public confidence in headteachers, raise aspirations, secure high academic standards in the nation's schools, and empower the teaching profession.

The context for headteachers changes constantly. In most contexts, a headteacher has led one school; in some settings headteachers are responsible for leading more than one school. Job titles are various - including principal, executive, associate and co-headteacher – as are the governance arrangements to which headteachers are accountable.

These standards are intended as *guidance* to underpin best practice, whatever the particular job description of the headteacher. They are to be interpreted in the context of each individual headteacher and school, and designed to be relevant to all headteachers, irrespective of length of service in post.

The standards can be used to:

- shape headteachers' own practice and professional development, within and beyond the school
- inform the appraisal of headteachers
- support the recruitment and appointment of headteachers
- provide a framework for training middle and senior leaders, aspiring to headship.

The Teachers' Standards (2011, as amended), including the Personal and Professional Code of Conduct which applies to all teachers, provide a foundation upon which the standards for headteachers are built.

## Preamble: the role of the headteacher

Headteachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of headteachers determine the achievements of schools. They are accountable for the education of current and future generations of children. Their leadership has a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in the

nation's classrooms. Headteachers lead by example the professional conduct and practice of teachers in a way that minimises unnecessary teacher workload and leaves room for high quality continuous professional development for staff. They secure a climate for the exemplary behaviour of pupils. They set standards and expectations for high academic standards within and beyond their own schools, recognising differences and respecting cultural diversity within contemporary Britain. Headteachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation's schools.

## The Four Domains

The *National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers* are set out in four domains, beginning with a Preamble. There are four 'Excellence As Standard' domains:

- Qualities and knowledge
- Pupils and staff
- Systems and process
- The self-improving school system

Within each domain there are six key characteristics expected of the nation's headteachers.

### Domain One

#### Excellent headteachers: qualities and knowledge

*Headteachers:*

1. Hold and articulate clear values and moral purpose, focused on providing a world-class education for the pupils they serve.
2. Demonstrate optimistic personal behaviour, positive relationships and attitudes towards their pupils and staff, and towards parents, governors and members of the local community.
3. Lead by example - with integrity, creativity, resilience, and clarity - drawing on their own scholarship, expertise and skills, and that of those around them.
4. Sustain wide, current knowledge and understanding of education and school systems locally, nationally and globally, and pursue continuous professional development.
5. Work with political and financial astuteness, within a clear set of principles centred on the school's vision, ably translating local and national policy into the school's context.
6. Communicate compellingly the school's vision and drive the strategic leadership, empowering all pupils and staff to excel.

## **Domain Two**

### **Excellent headteachers: pupils and staff**

#### *Headteachers:*

1. Demand ambitious standards for all pupils, overcoming disadvantage and advancing equality, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on pupils' outcomes.
2. Secure excellent teaching through an analytical understanding of how pupils learn and of the core features of successful classroom practice and curriculum design, leading to rich curriculum opportunities and pupils' well-being.
3. Establish an educational culture of 'open classrooms' as a basis for sharing best practice within and between schools, drawing on and conducting relevant research and robust data analysis.
4. Create an ethos within which all staff are motivated and supported to develop their own skills and subject knowledge, and to support each other.
5. Identify emerging talents, coaching current and aspiring leaders in a climate where excellence is the standard, leading to clear succession planning.
6. Hold all staff to account for their professional conduct and practice.

## **Domain Three**

### **Excellent headteachers: systems and process**

#### *Headteachers:*

1. Ensure that the school's systems, organisation and processes are well considered, efficient and fit for purpose, upholding the principles of transparency, integrity and probity.
2. Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all pupils and staff, focused on safeguarding pupils and developing their exemplary behaviour in school and in the wider society.
3. Establish rigorous, fair and transparent systems and measures for managing the performance of all staff, addressing any under-performance, supporting staff to improve and valuing excellent practice.
4. Welcome strong governance and actively support the governing board to understand its role and deliver its functions effectively – in particular its functions to set school strategy and hold the headteacher to account for pupil, staff and financial performance.

5. Exercise strategic, curriculum-led financial planning to ensure the equitable deployment of budgets and resources, in the best interests of pupils' achievements and the school's sustainability.
6. Distribute leadership throughout the organisation, forging teams of colleagues who have distinct roles and responsibilities and hold each other to account for their decision making.

## **Domain Four**

### **Excellent headteachers: the self-improving school system**

#### *Headteachers:*

1. Create outward-facing schools which work with other schools and organisations - in a climate of mutual challenge - to champion best practice and secure excellent achievements for all pupils.
2. Develop effective relationships with fellow professionals and colleagues in other public services to improve academic and social outcomes for all pupils.
3. Challenge educational orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence, harnessing the findings of well evidenced research to frame self-regulating and self-improving schools.
4. Shape the current and future quality of the teaching profession through high quality training and sustained professional development for all staff.
5. Model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to school improvement, leadership and governance, confident of the vital contribution of internal and external accountability.
6. Inspire and influence others - within and beyond schools - to believe in the fundamental importance of education in young people's lives and to promote the value of education.

## Supporting guidance

### Who are the standards for?

1. The standards are intended to be a helpful tool for headteachers, those responsible for governance and aspiring headteachers.

### What are the standards for?

2. The intention is for these standards to represent contemporary headship in schools today, inspire public confidence in headteachers, secure high academic standards in the nation's schools, and empower the teaching profession. They are intended to replace the 2004 National Headteacher Standards by bringing the standards up to date so that they are relevant for the school system that has developed since 2004.
3. They have been written to be relevant to all headteachers, irrespective of setting or length of service, but are to be interpreted in context.
4. These standards are designed to be thought-provoking, and to require discussion in schools.
5. They are developmental. All headteachers are on a journey to improve throughout their career, and the standards can be used to support this.
6. The standards will help headteachers to develop and increase their capability to support the development of the school-led system, and in many cases lead this development. The standards challenge headteachers to develop and improve themselves, their own schools, and other schools.
7. The standards are aspirational and challenging.

### What are the standards not for?

1. The standards are different from The Teachers' Standards in that they are non-mandatory and they do not set a baseline of expected performance. They therefore should not be used as a checklist or as a baseline, and any shortcoming with respect to the standards is not, in and of itself, the basis for questioning competence or initiating capability.
2. This being the case, it would be inappropriate to create complex 'levels' or gradations for each characteristic set out in the standards.
3. While the standards, taken together, can help to identify areas for development in a particular context, it is important not to lose sight of the full range of characteristics of highly effective leadership which the standards as a whole describe.



## Using the Standards

### **1. They can be used by headteachers to shape their own practice and professional development, within and beyond the school**

- Self-development is key to the development of a headteacher. These standards can be used by headteachers as a framework for such self-development, for them to consider what they have done already or need to do going forward to move closer to the aspirations set out in the standards. They may choose to seek feedback from colleagues and governors based on the standards.
- Headteachers can use the standards to have a constructive conversation with their governors about the areas in which the headteacher feels they need support to develop. Headteachers should feel empowered and entitled to seek such support.
- Headteachers can use the standards as part of supporting their staff, and for identifying the skills and knowledge they need in their leadership team.

### **2. They can be used by governors, to inform the appraisal of headteachers**

- These standards can be used to inform the appraisal of headteachers by serving as a background document to assist governing boards, rather than as a set of standards against which the headteacher's performance can be assessed in an appraisal process.
- For example, the standards may be used to inform objective setting. The headteacher standards should not be used as 'cut and paste' objectives. Objectives must be tailored so that they are relevant to the context of the individual school and headteacher. It is good practice for governors to set headteachers specific school-related objectives and targets linked to their school or schools' priorities on an annual basis. Governors should use the standards aspirationally and developmentally. Actions for the headteacher can be agreed with these aspirational standards in mind, but will need to be in the context of where the school is now in a certain area and what is needed to move it to the next step of improvement.
- Governors can use the headteacher standards in appraisal to frame a broad overview of leadership in the specific context of the school. The standards may further serve as a starting point for the identification of specific objectives for the next stage of the school's continuous improvement journey, as well as to identify areas of development where the headteacher requires support and improvement.
- Governors should work with headteachers to understand what the school needs in order to progress. They should consider what needs to be done to support the headteacher to implement the school improvement plan and support colleagues.

### **3. They can be used by governors, to support the recruitment and appointment of headteachers**

- The standards can be used to underpin and shape role descriptions and person specifications. It is important to focus on the particular context of the individual school, as schools in differing contexts and at different stages of development will require differing blends of skills and experience of headteachers. Governors may want to investigate some of the characteristics set out in the standards in more detail than others with prospective headteachers.
- Equally, given the broad and holistic nature of the standards, governing boards can use the standards as a check to ensure that their selection process is sufficiently comprehensive, covering all of the key areas of headship set out in the standards.

**4. They can be used by headteachers, governing boards and aspirant headteachers, to provide a framework for training middle and senior leaders, aspiring to headship.**

- The transition to headship involves mastering a broad range of competences. The standards are not an exclusive or complete list of these skills.
- Headteachers and governors may use the standards to help them identify potential future leaders. The standards can be used to shape the developmental experiences offered to middle and senior leaders.
- Aspirant headteachers can use the standards to evaluate their own progress towards being prepared for headship, and to identify and articulate the areas they want to gain more experience in. For example, a middle leader may decide that they have not as much experience of the fourth domain of the standards and so may seek experience as part of school collaboration in a different school in order to broaden their experience.

## Further information

### Appraisal

- The Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2012
- The [Governors' Handbook](#)
- [The Schoolteachers' Pay and Conditions Document](#)
- ['Implementing your school's approach to pay, Departmental advice for maintained schools and local authorities'](#) (September 2014)
- ['A guide to recruiting and selecting a new headteacher', NCSL and NGA](#)

### Equalities Issues

Links to advice on the Equalities Act 2010:

- [The Equalities and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#)
- [The Equality Act 2010: advice for schools](#)
- EHRC Publication - [Equal Pay: Statutory Code of Practice](#)

### National programmes to support the development of middle leaders and senior leaders

- [National Professional Qualifications for Middle Leaders](#)
- [National Professional Qualifications for Senior Leaders](#)

### Teachers' Standards

The Teachers' Standards can be found in Annex 1 of the Schoolteachers' Pay and Conditions Document. More information is available at

- [Teachers' standards](#)



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