

Protecting staff from nonsense - Sam Strickland

Wellbeing has always been central to effective education, but in a time of rapid policy change, shifting accountability, and systemic uncertainty, it has become essential. Across the UK, school leaders are navigating curriculum reforms, assessment changes, reforms to SEND policy, an updated Ofsted framework, and workforce pressures, all at once.

In this context, staff wellbeing is not a “nice to have”; it is a foundation for sustainable improvement. High turnover, burnout, and presenteeism are not individual failings, they are signals that systems and structures need attention. Leaders shape the conditions in which policy is enacted, and supporting staff is not about lowering standards; it is about creating environments where teachers and school leaders can focus on what matters most, do demanding work well over time, and deliver a coherent, high-quality curriculum.

In this recording, Sam Strickland explores how leaders can protect staff while navigating national change, prioritising curriculum initiatives, and balancing ambition with care, accountability with humanity, and reform with compassion. The reflection questions that follow explore ways for teachers and leaders to balance staff wellbeing with delivering high curricular expectations for every pupil.

Reflection questions

For teachers

- How do I focus my teaching on what matters most in the curriculum, rather than reacting to every new initiative or policy change?
- Which elements of my planning, assessment, or classroom routines could be simplified to allow more time for pupils to build powerful knowledge?
- How do I maintain my subject knowledge and professional expertise while managing competing demands from curriculum reform and accountability expectations?

For middle leaders

- Where could I reduce or remove “white noise” tasks to give staff time and space to focus on curriculum?
- How do I ensure clarity and consistency in the curriculum across my department, so that teachers can deliver it confidently and sustainably?
- What mechanisms do I use to gather teacher input and feedback when implementing curriculum reforms?
- How do I balance the demands of accountability, inspection frameworks, and national reforms with the wellbeing and professional growth of my staff?

For senior leaders

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films for teachers and leaders

- How does our school's curriculum strategy reflect our core educational priorities, even amidst national policy changes and reform pressures?
- What systems do we have to protect staff from unnecessary workload while still ensuring high-quality curriculum delivery and pupil outcomes?
- How are we providing sufficient time, guidance, and professional development to enable staff to embed curriculum change thoughtfully and sustainably?
- How are we modelling leadership that balances ambition with care, accountability with humanity, and reform with compassion?