



Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your interest in the post of Strategic Leader advertised by Leicestershire County Council. The context in which this post is set is relatively complex. As a result, the job details may leave you with some questions about the post which this letter aims to address.

At the heart of the post is the aim of rapidly evolving our current system for supporting permanently excluded secondary pupils and those “at-risk” so that it is a best fit for the current educational environment.

There are four distinct stakeholder groups who have come together to plan for the future of **secondary** inclusion in the county. These are:

1. Leicestershire Local Authority – with the legal duty to provide for pupils who have been excluded from school, a positive track record in championing vulnerable pupils and a strong continuing commitment to the principles of Inclusion.
2. The Chairs of Partnerships and their dedicated Partnerships staff who have been working together for twelve years to lead partnerships of schools in providing support to build inclusive practice, and support to “at risk” and excluded pupils.
3. The schools and MATs working in the county who continue to strive for robust provision for all pupils. but are increasingly aware of the forces that make partnership work more difficult than in the past and are at the forefront of meeting the challenge of increasing complexity of need.
4. The parents and the students themselves – an underrepresented stake holder group in our discussions.

We think it is fair to say that these stakeholders, LA, Partnerships and many of the schools remain committed to the underlying principles of Inclusion that inspired us all to create our Inclusion Partnerships more than a decade ago.

Current Arrangements

At the outset there was a common view that the needs of excluded and at-risk pupils were best met by schools working together, pooling expertise and resources in their localities rather than continuing with a PRU model that was often in crisis. The LA responded positively to this collective view by working with Headteachers on a Partnership Agreement that devolved High Needs Block money used for PRU provision to local groups of schools in return for a commitment by those schools to eschew the use of permanent exclusion. (There is now no roll for excluded pupils in the county, all pupils either remain on their home school roll or after a permanent exclusion are placed on roll at local partnership school.) One school in each of five areas in the county stepped forward to act as “Fund Holder” for the local school group. The Headteacher of the Fund Holding School became Chair the Partnership. Over the years the groups of schools have built small staff teams who manage education

programmes for this at-risk group, blending “home base” provision of academic and PSHE style learning with external AP placements.

The development of MATS, the development of more varied styles of school leadership, the increased pressure on school leaders and the growing complexity and number of pupils in the “at risk” category have put these arrangements under strain. Whilst Partnership Staff continue to operate and develop effective provision a sign of “a system under strain” is the marked rise in the permanent exclusions.

(We have always accepted that the occasional permanent exclusion might be justified for a range of reasons; we have always collectively recognised that the power to permanently exclude a pupil is an important underpinning of the authority of school leaders. Our partnership approach asked schools always to use permanent exclusion as a last resort, consulting with Chairs before doing so and doing all they could to support the collective decision-making approach that aimed to ensure that precious resources were allocated fairly in each locality.)

In conclusion, the difficulty in securing fund holding schools (and school leaders willing to give up time to serve as local Chairs), the pressure from increasing need and an uptick in permanent exclusions has shown us all that our system needs to change.

Our common principles

1. All stake holders want provision and outcomes for this group of pupils to improve. We recognise that low attendance, engagement and challenging behaviour are often a sign of underlying and unmet need. Generally, our education system has been insufficiently ambitious for these pupils.
2. Most of us continue to see permanent exclusion as a very “blunt instrument” that can be damaging to the excluded. At the same time, we recognise that schools must be able to access swift and effective support at those times of crisis for individual pupils for their sake and for the sake of all the other pupils in the school.
3. There is a broad acceptance that the at-risk pupils should (as far as is possible) remain a local responsibility, that their time out of school as a result of poor behaviour should be minimised and that they should transition back to mainstream or onto specialist places sooner rather than later.
4. Where individual schools or groups set out to develop their own Inclusive provision that removes their need to use permanent exclusion, we want to be ready to support.
5. Recreating a PRU is not a solution that we wish to consider.
6. We share the imperative to retain our teams of highly skilled and committed staff working in our localities to build their already strong expertise in this field.
7. We value the developing strength of multi-agency working and the way that our current structures support this.
8. We welcome central government concern about the quality of alternative settings and know that we must build on our existing quality assurance and support mechanisms to ensure that we make best use of these settings.

The new post

We now face the challenge of building a new system or structure to replace our current “Fundholding – Chair of Partnership” model with one that will continue to meet our principles and needs. Currently we are exploring the potential of a Charitable Incorporated Company as a delivery model. We think this has the potential for acting as a bridge between LA and schools and

strengthening accountability to both. We remain open to other approaches, such as a trust-led model. Work is currently in process to explore the viability of this.

This Strategic Leader post will take on the job of planning a viable way forward for our system and implementing a process of change to establish a new county wide support service. We believe this process is likely to take a full year. We then envisage that a different focus - as a head of service / leader of the newly established organisation will be required. Whilst focus might shift both roles require high level communication and leadership qualities. Building and maintaining our partnership across all the stakeholders requires strength to sustain our principles of inclusion. It requires sensitivity and empathy to maintain cohesion of purpose amongst and between the stakeholders.

The Local Authority will be the employer in the planning period and is offering this role as a one-year fixed term contract. This might suit a senior education leader at a transition point in their career or available to accept a secondment. Our thinking is that the Strategic Lead might then move to be the CEO of the new county wide organisation after this planning period and that the post would then be funded out of a Local Authority Commissioning Agreement with the new organisation. We are all therefore interested in applications both from candidates who see this as a one year challenge and those who will, in addition, aim for transition into the new long term permanent post.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the post further before applying contact astephenson@leicsseips.org

We look forward to receiving your completed application.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of Chairs, Staff and LA Officers