

MAKE SCHOOL STAFF MEETINGS MATTER

10 QUESTIONS TO SPARK LIVELY DISCUSSIONS

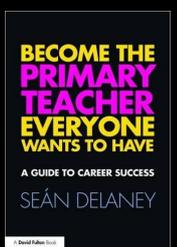
SEÁN DELANEY

Resource for Teachers based on

Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have: A Guide to Career Success

by Seán Delaney

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Make School Staff Meetings Matter

You know the problem. Short time together, much to discuss. You and your colleagues want to talk about teaching and learning but most time goes on run-of-the-mill matters like the annual calendar, misbehaviour in the playground, school tours and sports days; little time or energy remains to discuss core work of the school. Here are ten questions to direct discussions towards teaching and learning.

1. **What preparation for teaching is practised in this school?** Many teachers like teaching but dislike the accompanying paperwork. Invest time only in written work that advances your teaching and children's learning. Preparation that helps your teaching can take many forms. And teaching something helps you prepare better for subsequent teaching. Take pride in your work and find ways to record the teaching and learning you orchestrate in the classroom.

For more on preparation and planning, read pp 7-12 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

2. **What do children learn about behaving responsibly in this school?** In relationships with teachers and in how children conduct themselves, children may learn that it's important not to be caught misbehaving. If they are caught, children may learn to deny doing what they did or to make excuses for it. Alternatively children may learn to be responsible in their behaviour and to accept any consequences of their transgressions. What is done in this school to promote responsible behaviour among children?

For more ideas about managing children's behaviour, read pp 33-39 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

3. **How can we make teaching more engaging for children?** If children are not engaged in school, they'll learn little of value. It's easy to think about buying new schemes and attractive resources to enhance teaching. But maybe there's other ways to change how we teach that will raise children's achievement: plan and plant a herb garden, direct a video about a local geographical feature, create a sculpture to commemorate a historical event, interview and record someone through Irish, or design a mathematics trail around the school.

Read pp 59-62 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have* to inform a discussion on teaching methods.

4. **How do we challenge high-achieving children?** What is done to identify exceptionally able children in the school? Such children may appreciate opportunities to work independently but may need help to learn how to do this. A mentor might help: a retired teacher or someone with specific expertise, perhaps. Decide if the regular curriculum has been mastered before providing opportunities for additional challenges and independent work. The NCCA prepared draft guidelines on the topic: http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/Except%20Able_Glines.pdf.

Read pp 107-110 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have* to inform your discussion on differentiating for high achievers.

5. **What is our policy on homework?** Not how long children in each class level should spend on it. Let's discuss the point of it, really. Let's try and find out how different children in each class do their homework—where, when, with whom, and so on. Do children learn anything by doing homework? Wouldn't it be good to think about giving homework that most children would look forward to doing?

For more on homework, read pp 123-135 and 259-267 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

6. **How do we give feedback to children?** In order to give constructive feedback, a teacher needs to assess children. Such assessment is formative and often informal. Carol Dweck's research on mindsets shows that what teachers say to children can affect how they perceive themselves. Think of "You're a great singer" versus "You put a lot of effort into singing that song so well." Both are conceivable responses to a child singing well. The former promotes a fixed mindset, acknowledging a talent but recognising little agency on the child's part. The latter acknowledges effort made and is more helpful for future learning.

For more on feedback, read pp. 141-144 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

7. **Why should parents attend parent-teacher meetings?** Conducting parent-teacher meetings differs from teachers' regular daily work. Let's share ideas about how to make those meetings the best they can be for parents and teachers. How do different teachers prepare for these meetings? How can you tell each parent something they don't know about their child but that they recognise as true? Give parents an incentive to attend, especially those you suspect might not want to.

For more on parent-teacher meetings, read pp. 177-183 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

8. **How are teachers looked after in this school?** The most important resource in any school is its people and teachers are central. Teaching can be exhilarating but it can also be exhausting. How do teachers in this school retain their appetite for teaching? How do teachers stay healthy? Are teachers aware of health hazards of teaching such as voice strain? Is everyone tuned in to warning signs that overload is approaching for themselves or for their colleagues? How do teachers support one another?

For more about looking after yourself, read pp. 202-208 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

9. **How is technology changing teaching?** Many areas of our lives from healthcare to shopping and from communicating to travelling have been transformed by technology. Technology has changed teaching only at the edges to date. But this could change. What are the implications of technology for this school? How should it change what we emphasise and how we do our work? Teaching is essentially human and there is no need for fear; nor can we be complacent. Developments need to be monitored and discussed.

For more about technology and teaching, read pp. 213-217 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

10. **How well do we teach children how to study?** Give someone an apple, feed them for a day. Help them plant an apple tree, feed them for life. Study is the same. Yet, often how children study receives only scant attention in school. What kind of study skills do we expect children to learn? How do they learn them? How are the skills developed from one class to the next throughout the school? How do children learn tables and spellings? How do they memorise poetry? How well do they use mnemonics or cognitive maps? How well do children monitor their own learning?

For more on study strategies that children can learn, read pp 129-130 and pp 259-267 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have*.

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