

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS - CEO

School leadership takes many forms, but despite the differences in each role, they are unified by their dedication to excellence in education and creating an atmosphere where students and teachers can thrive.

Hayley spoke with Julie Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) which supports over 1300 schools, to understand more about the ISC and what successful leadership in schools looks like.

What does leadership mean to you in your role as Executive Officer of the Independent Schools Council?

“Directing the work of ISC’s team so that we are clear about what we are aiming to achieve and are effectively deployed in delivering objectives strategically and professionally. As leader, I feel it’s my duty to ensure staff are empowered to thrive working for the organisation, working together productively and with freedom to shape the way we do things.”

We are a small team and every individual contributes value. For me, leading means getting the best out of ourselves, serving our member associations, schools and the children in them and ensuring regular check-ins with stakeholders so we deploy resources correctly, given shifting priorities in priorities in the national political and educational context. Education deserves optimistic leadership and I’m mindful of maintaining positivity.”

What do you think is key to successful leadership in schools?

“There’s an expectation (from parents and governors) of a figurehead head teacher, and in reality, I think there are many “keys”: articulating and embodying the school mission so that values are overt; marketing the school to stakeholders; nurturing and supporting staff (attracting and retaining good staff); managing the relationship with the proprietor/school governors; communicating effectively with various stakeholders and local contacts; for the leadership team, Head/Bursar/Chair of Governors (or equivalents) form a key leadership team dynamic. There’s a need to both look outwards, understanding what children need from school and a strong focus on providing pupil care and education well.

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The head can have varying patterns of strengths and weaknesses but must understand the important priorities of safeguarding, child protection, health and safety, education and business planning and have a senior leadership team of staff who overall command the skills and strengths required to deliver success for that school in its context.”

What do you see as the biggest challenge to the independent education sector?

“Different schools face differing levels of local competition, financial challenges and recruitment difficulties, but we all face a big ideological challenge due to current political and public attitudes. Most schools need to prioritise their business planning, ensuring they are professional, efficient and well-targeted in their offer. Stronger, more financially confident schools appreciate the need to ensure pupils demonstrate humility and understanding of the value of civics in their community work and school culture. Like the state sector, schools are experiencing significant challenges with recruitment, retention and wellbeing issues.”



Hayley Minter joined Anderson Quigley as a Partner in 2022 to further develop the schools and colleges practice. She specialises in the education sector and connecting talent that is passionate about providing high quality inclusive education. She has built a track record with education leaders and helped many organisations identifying top talent.

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Julie Robinson has spent the last eight years at the ISC, serving as the CEO since 2019. The ISC brings together seven associations of independent schools, their heads, bursars and governors, representing over 1,300 independent schools in the UK and overseas.

You can [follow her on LinkedIn](#).

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