

4.11 Offering Encouragement – Encouraging Service

To lead in education is to give courage to teachers and children, rooted in energising memories and summoned by radical hopes. Leaders advocate for their people, noticing things going well, cheering on and never missing an opportunity to praise. Their encouragement and coaching nurtures leaders who go on to achieve even greater things than the leader themselves. They encourage generous acts of kindness, inspiring children to respect and serve others first.

Offering Encouragement

To *en*-courage another person is literally 'to put heart into' them, to give them the vision, belief and energy to start or keep moving forward, just as to '*in*-spire' another is to put into them breath, or life. Courage is built on the confidence of the shared stories of our past and leads us towards an unknown future within a bigger picture. Leaders who encourage need themselves to be inspired by encouragement and resourcing – through mentoring and supervision, governors, colleagues and other stakeholders, continuing professional development, and continuing spiritual exploration and encounter.

Leaders establish rhythms of prayer – of evaluation and gratitude, reflection and grace, enabling others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new. Encouraging leaders are not rose-tinted in how they see the future, nor are they simply 'glass half-full' people. Rather they take challenge seriously, and they define reality accurately, even when it presents uncomfortable truth.

The biblical narrative is no stranger to suffering, and recognises times of feeling surrounded, yet comforted and assured of the bigger picture – the encouraging perspective of faith. Isaiah writes 'when not if': "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned." (Isaiah 43:2), while the Psalmist cries out surrounded: "I lift my eyes to the mountains, where does my help

come from?" (Psalm 121:1). Jesus himself acknowledges the reality of the challenge, but gives encouragement and the offer of life in all its fullness: "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), while Paul opening his second letter to the church in Corinth draws repeatedly on the legal notion of a *paraclete* (or advocate), speaking of a "God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Encouragement is fundamentally relational, following the call to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24); this kind of leadership notices others, spots the good and catches people doing well. The advocate is someone consistent in your corner, giving validation, purpose and identity, and providing a safe environment for risk-taking and growth. Their nurturing words are chosen wisely, and are offered regularly, replenishing and enabling, restoring and renewing.

Encouragement takes some of the strain of leadership, giving perspective to the pressure of success or fear of failure, and replacing this with the call to faithfulness. The Psalmist speaks of a God who is both our shade and our shadow (Psalm 17:8, 63:7, 121:5), countering our dominant educational meta-narrative of 'not good enough', while Jesus offers peace and rest for the busy and fearful: "Come to me, all you

who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls". (Matthew 11:28) This relational rest is grounded in teams known for a culture of encouragement.

Leaders set the tone, noticing and appreciating, boosting, giving validation, removing the fear of risk-taking, advocating for those lacking in confidence, and drawing everyone into realising the school's vision and purpose.

1. When you think back across your journey to date, who has genuinely encouraged and inspired you in your career? What did they do, and how could you thank them?
2. In moments or seasons of challenge or crisis, how can leaders 'enable others to come back the next day with the imagination of something new'?
3. What strikes you about the 'when not if' of Isaiah – 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned'?
4. To what extent do you identify with the meta-narrative of 'not good enough' in education? Who is in your corner, or who do you need to ask to move into your corner?