Joanna Heasman's Development Work
Supporting the development of non-teaching staff in pastoral roles
at The John Henry Newman School, Stevenage

Joanna had been the school's office manager for some years when the idea of inviting non-teachers to take on roles within the school's pastoral care structure first arose. When she was a student at secondary school Joanna had been interested in becoming a teacher but the Careers Guidance teacher had discouraged her on the grounds that she lacked the required personal attributes. The division between teaching and non-teaching roles in the school had often been discussed and the introduction of non-teaching staff in the pastoral structure was strongly encouraged by the Senior Leadership Team. After shadowing an experienced form tutor during the previous term Joanna became a Year 7 Form Tutor.

Joanna joined the school's Teacher Led Development Work group which provided a structure that would help her to evaluate her experience in this role and explore ways to support the development of other non-teaching colleagues in pastoral roles. She began by consulting a number of books, articles and websites to help her to develop a way forward. She found Marland and Rogers' (1997) views on tutoring particularly thought provoking. She was also interested to learn that the need to develop support staff has been long acknowledged by the DfES (2002).

She wanted the views of the other four non-teaching colleagues who had also taken on pastoral roles in her school. They met to discuss their new roles and the induction and support they had been provided with. Some colleagues felt that they had been fully prepared whereas for others the experience had been less positive. An interesting debate developed concerning the degree to which it is up to individuals to take the initiative to secure the development opportunities they need. They all found this discussion helpful, thought-provoking and supportive so decided to meet regularly as a mutual support and development group.

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An important step in identifying ways to support form tutors who are not teachers was for Joanna to meet with the Year 7 Learning Co-ordinator to review the practices and systems she had devised as a form tutor. The Co-ordinator felt very positive about the experience of having non-teachers in the team and encouraged Joanna to develop ways to support more non-teaching colleagues in this role. The next step was to contact two other schools with experience of this move. One of them invited Joanna to visit which enabled her to explore the potential of non-teaching staff in pastoral roles. A third step was to talk to some students in her own school who had experienced a non-teaching form tutor.

The students were, as always, a powerful source of thought-provoking information. They were positive about the introduction of non-teachers as form tutors, commenting that they appreciated the way in which non-teachers professionally prepared for aspects which they had less experience in, for example, leading PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) sessions. They suggested that it would be helpful, when allocating personnel to form groups to take account of their other roles in the school. For example, allocating the administrator responsible for public examinations to a Year 11 group could be mutually beneficial. The students commented that there can be some discipline issues at first with a non-teaching tutor but that, as relationships and respect are built, these problems are soon alleviated.

Joanna gathered evidence of these consultations together in order to influence the school's policy. She developed a training plan for support staff who wished to take on the role of form tutor which was accepted by the senior leadership team. This plan would be put into action in the year prior to the non-teacher taking on a pastoral role and would include the following developmental activities for staff:

- Shadowing at least two form tutors for a protracted period
- Undertaking tasks such as registration procedures, being observed doing this and having feedback by the Learning Co-ordinator
- Joint-teaching of PSHE lessons with an experienced teacher
- Meeting regularly with the relevant Learning Co-ordinator to identify gaps in skills or understanding

The training plan would continue to be used to support the non-teacher once they actually began in their pastoral role.

Joanna now believes that there are further possibilities for the development of non-teaching staff in pastoral roles at her school. Inspired by her visits to other schools in the region, she intends to research the idea of developing non-teaching staff as pastoral co-ordinators. She feels that non-teaching staff would be particularly effective with the administration tasks that the Learning Co-ordinators have to undertake and the management of the data which is so important to track student progress (Kyriacou, 1997). She also feels that contact with parents could be eased through access to someone whose time is not fully taken up with classroom teaching. Joanna remains excited and optimistic about the prospects for future development of the non-teaching roles.

References

Department for Education and Skills (2002) *Consultation on Developing the Role of School Support Staff.* London: DfES.

Kyriacou, C. (1997) *Effective teaching in schools*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes.

Marland, M. & Rogers, R. (1997) *The Art of the Tutor: Developing your role in the Secondary School.* London: David Fulton.