



Embodying Integrity

The integrity of leaders is the extent to which their actions, words, budgets, diaries, agendas and decision-making reflect their values and character. This involves honesty, perseverance and reliability: “The Lord...delights in people who are trustworthy” (Proverbs 12:22). Integrity is the integrator of learning, practical wisdom, decision-making, and actions that put vision into practice. Paul gathers key related elements together in his practical list of the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Job is a biblical archetype of integrity, as commended in the story by God himself: “There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity...” (Job 2:3) Job is tested through the deaths of his children, the loss of his wealth and social standing, extreme physical suffering, and unwise spiritual advice from friends. The critical issue is whether he will stay loyal to God when stripped of nearly everything except his anguished, questioning relationship with God. He demonstrates what mature faith is like: facing challenging situations and enduring severe testing, asking the hard questions and sustaining the search for meaning, listening critically

to the opinions of others but making one’s own judgements, and letting some big questions remain open.

An integrity that is open to such a God allows for others too to maintain their particular integrity, even if it is very different. Integrity is one of the great challenges facing a plural, multi-religious and multi-secular world, and there are many areas where schools need to deal with this. Leaders need to listen as deeply as possible to what constitutes the integrity of others, to engage in appropriate conversation with them, and then, when there are practical consequences for their school, to work out through respectful discussion, negotiation, and if necessary mediation, how best to find a way forward.

On sensitive matters, there can be immense pressures exerted by special-interest groups, social media campaigns, concerned parents, and the many other stakeholders in education. The wise leader continually cultivates understanding and commitment around the school’s vision and policies and builds the networks of support that can weather storms. When the storms happen, a vital element in coming through them is confidence in the integrity and authenticity of those who lead the school.

1. **If you did a survey with your colleagues, to what extent might they perceive that your ‘actions, words, budgets, diaries, agendas and decision-making’ reflect your values and character?**
2. **What is the relationship between integrity and authenticity in leadership?**
3. **How is leaders’ integrity affected by personal and professional challenges?**
4. **When people get things wrong in your organisation, do they feel able to share? Who gets the blame?**