



Advice for Aspiring School Mathematics Leaders

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Ten primary School Mathematics Leaders responded to a survey asking them to give advice to teachers who were about to take on the responsibilities of leading the teaching and learning of mathematics. The leadership role has long been recognised as being complex in nature, having many demands, and involving tensions. Recently with changes in emphasis and direction in some aspects of mathematics education this complexity has increased, and some school mathematics leaders find themselves conflicted. Many of these changes have created clashes between what school mathematics leaders' value and believe to be effective practice and what has been advocated or mandated. There is no doubt that school mathematics leaders continue to play a critical role in supporting teachers' professional development and that their work is integral to the success of mathematics learning in schools (Driscoll, 2021). Few studies have reported the advice experienced mathematics leaders in primary schools would provide to others. We report the perspectives and insights of ten experienced leaders who responded to the question *What advice would you give to teachers who are just about to take on the responsibilities of leading the teaching and learning of mathematics?*

Four major themes are discussed in the full paper: Vision and purpose, Knowledge making and sharing, Relationship building, and Personal qualities.

The mathematics leadership role seems to be as complex as ever. The experienced school mathematics leaders when considering teachers who are new to leadership responsibilities had two main areas of advice: to have a clear sense of direction and purpose and to think of leadership as knowledge-building. The importance of imagining a school where every student learns mathematics enthusiastically and where research-informed pedagogy is in place was foremost. The school mathematics leaders acknowledged that to achieve this aim would require sharing knowledge and skills in a learning community built on trust, collaboration and resilience. Building personal professional knowledge and that of others through collaboration and shared experiences seems to be fundamental to being an effective school mathematics leader. These views help us to understand some of the tensions created by educational authorities when prescribed mathematics teaching approaches are instituted. The advice of the experienced leaders also highlighted personal elements of the role. For example, to continue to learn, listen carefully to colleagues, embrace mistakes as opportunities for growth and sustain a passion for mathematics and its teaching. By capturing these insights, the study provides practical guidance for aspiring mathematics leaders and highlights the personal and relational qualities essential for effective leadership.

References

Driscoll, K. (2021). *An investigation of the ways in which School Mathematics Leaders support primary teachers' professional learning*. Thesis, Monash University. Melbourne, Australia.

For more information, please refer to the following paper presented at the 48th Annual Conference of MERGA in July 2026.
Driscoll, K. & Cheeseman, J. (2026). Advice for aspiring school mathematics leaders. In N. Berger, M. Thompson, J. Ley & C. Wilsmore (Eds.), *Beyond boundaries: Strengthening futures in mathematics education*. Proceedings of the 48th annual conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia, Sydney (pp. 114-121). MERGA.