

**Q** Question: I start my NQ year in a maintained school in September and I am, of course, looking forward to it. I stated on the application form that I am a practising Christian involved in youth work. The only thing picked up at my interview was the concern that church youth work might prove to be a distraction during the demands of my first year. I want to be clear about my Christianity from the start. How can I do this best?

**A** Advice: Before all else, can I say that you are very wise to be thinking about this before the event. Many people don't have the same foresight, and that can lead to difficulties later on.

The finest way to be a credible witness for Jesus Christ in your school is to be a good learner and a good teacher, and this comes with time and effort. I have known some Christians in education, who, frankly, present an unlovely view of the faith. And this sometimes happens because they separate their faith life from their work life: Mr Nice Guy on Sunday, Mr Nasty on Monday.

At the risk of sounding patronising, I offer some ways to establish a good foundation in your life's work. Firstly, remember the three pillars of health: diet, exercise and sleep. Then, remember the three pillars of a strong and nourishing spiritual life: prayer, Bible reading and fellowship. Ignore them, and your wellbeing may come crashing down.

There will be a lot that you don't know, and more challenging still are the things that you don't know that you don't know. This is why relationships with colleagues are so important, and need establishing early on. You will have a line manager who may also be your headteacher, and also a mentor appointed to lead and guide you through the first year. But consider others, both teachers and support staff, who can help. Make an effort to remember colleagues' names and unless your memory is measured in gigabytes, I suggest that you keep a note book handy.

Never be afraid to ask for help from experienced colleagues – you'll quickly sort out the best ones to ask. Now, this is very important: if things get tough or complicated you might be tempted to keep your head down and solve problems yourself. Resist that at all costs, and reach out for help. Consider colleagues, family and Christians in education in your church. Remember that ACT offers to members a confidential advice service on professional matters.

Your local authority will most likely offer an induction programme for new staff. Find out about it and make sure you go!

If you are open about your Christianity you will soon find any other Christians on the staff. Consider joining a prayer group of colleagues, if there is one, and starting one if there is not. Keep your home group informed of the needs on your frontline. You are starting out on a big adventure. Take God into the classroom with you.

If you want to learn and understand more about the mechanics of teaching for Christians, how to keep your work and faith together, and exactly how knowing Jesus makes a difference, start by exploring <http://www.whatiflearning.co.uk/> and spend some quality time with <http://www.johnshortt.org/>

Bon Voyage.

Robert Hall