

Allison Collis

Headteacher - Chestnuts Primary

What brought you to Milton Keynes?

I moved here from Derby in the summer of 2006. I took a teaching job at another local school, Long Meadow, as I was relocating with my young family. Milton Keynes just looked like an exciting place to be, especially for a young family.



What positions have you held?

I was at Long Meadow for two years before moving to Chestnuts in 2008. I've held a number of positions in my time at Chestnuts, including Key Stage Leader, Assistant Head, Deputy Head and Headteacher.

I'd been to MK a number of times and the place just appealed to me – there is so much open space, you can go for a walk anywhere and at any time. Everything is on your doorstep. I love the grid road system in terms of how quick it is to get from A-Z. The major retail shops are all nearby too. As a newcomer I loved that the city was trying to be the biggest and best at everything and it had a real forward thinking mentality.

How has working in MK enabled you to further your career?

I think because it's a growing city there are always lots of opportunities. You can't help but notice there are new schools opening all the time so that creates chances for people to move around and join new schools, or fill places left in current ones.

There's lots of CPD available and because MK is so central there's the chance to go to London, Birmingham, Manchester for conferences and courses to develop your school and further your career. Working here has enabled our school to showcase our development on a national stage. I've recently been to Prague where I spoke to and shared our good practice with regards to inclusion with European headteachers. I want our school to not only be outstanding, but to be world class. MK is the perfect place to make that happen.

If I wasn't in MK I don't think I'd be in the same position if I'd stayed in Derby. There was more competition there with less opportunity. In Milton Keynes the school community is very fluid, new faces are always coming in, they bring different ideas and that's really exciting for all of us. There's a great school community, we all support each other and congratulate each other on our successes, Ofsted outcomes for example. There's not a competition element, it's all encouragement.

What makes MK a great place to live and work?

The opportunity to move around and develop your professional development. Also the local authority is very determined to drive the schools and system on so it's a real journey in that sense. There's lots of networking opportunities with the teaching schools, PEP:MK etc which is really useful. We're also part of the Bletchley Partnership which is really important and allows us to share employees such as attendance officers, creating a real sense of community between schools. It's such a diverse place to work because you have a mix of all types of housing, ethnicities etc. Because of this all schools have a real mix of different people and cultures which is great.

What would you say to anyone considering coming here to teach?

I would definitely recommend it, and I have done! New schools, traditional schools, different areas of the city, there's something to suit every type of teacher and leader.

There are always opportunities available; you only have to look on the council's website to see the variety of jobs available. We currently have a shortage of teachers so we need more here. Two thirds of the headteacher population are over 50 at the moment, so we're really keen on succession planning and forward thinking to ensure a good future for education here.

I've got strong middle leaders in my school and if they're interested in moving into headships, I will support them. As much as I wouldn't want to lose them, those opportunities are there for them, and they will also create opportunities for others with what they leave.

Best thing about MK?

It's a young place. I have four teenagers and it's a great place for them to grow up with lots of open spaces and lots of activities organised in the school holidays. There are big events too such as music concerts at the Bowl and outdoor events at Campbell Park.

As far as living here is concerned, our house is by a lake, yet five minutes from the city centre. I never thought that would be possible but it's great. I live in the north of MK but can still get to work in Bletchley within 15 minutes, which doesn't seem possible but because of the amazing road system, it is.

Ultimately it's a really vibrant and approachable place, and very forward thinking and different, which suits me perfectly.

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