

WEEKEND

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Unlikely head has no regrets

At the tender age of eight, Anthony Goddard went to public school. After

university, 21 years with ICI and four as a management consultant, he took over, with his wife, Caroline, as head-teacher of Aysgarth School, at Newton-le-Willows.

Yet Mr Goddard had never taught, although he did once consider teaching as a career. He reflected on how this dramatic change came about as her prepared to retire after 13 years in charge at the North Yorkshire school.

Born in Kuala Lumpur of an Army family, Mr Goddard was brought up in the West Country. After university he joined ICI and spent 21 happy years on Teesside. Leaving the confines of a large employer, he became a consultant.

The Goddards lived near Darlington, and when the time came to select a school for his son, Aysgarth was the choice. Quickly snapped up as a school governor, when the headmaster was set to retire, Mr Goddard put out tentative feelers.

He says: "I expressed an interest in the chair of governors who said he would take my application seriously, so I resigned as a governor and the process started. I applied with Caroline, as I felt we should apply as a couple, and I made my case."

With no educational experience, and not being a qualified teacher, then or now, he knew he faced an uphill battle. He was determined to convince the interview panel he was the right man.

He says: "Much of how to be a headteacher is motivating people and managing a business and ICI had trained

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For 13 years, Anthony Goddard and his wife Caroline have run Aysgarth School in North Yorkshire. Now set to retire, he talks to **Philip Sedgwick**

us superbly. I asked what does a head do? Run a business, lead, market the school, get the best out of others? I spent most of my career doing just that."

In the end, he managed to convince he possessed all the necessary attributes to succeed and commenced work in September 2002.

He recalls: "I was over the moon and have never regretted it for a moment."

The Reverend Clement Hayles, whose portrait gazes serenely across the dining room, founded the school in 1877. His ideal was for an educational establishment to prepare boys to attend the country's leading schools.

The original site was at Aysgarth, with the present building at Newton-le-Willows opening in 1890. It boasted an indoor heated swimming pool, which would be a considerable asset to any school now, let alone in the Victorian era.

The school has a proud history – 162 former pupils gave the ultimate sacrifice in two world wars. Old boys number Olympic rower Matthew Pinsent, explorer Robert Swan, the first man to walk to both poles, and philanthropist investor Jonathan Ruffer.

Military past pupils include Basil Guy, a VC winner in 1900, and Tom Orde-Powlett, awarded the MC 103 years later.

Set in 50 acres, the school employs 60 staff. Half are teachers, the remainder are

assistants, cooks, gardeners, mastrons, and in administration.

The main school has 150 boys from the ages of eight to 13, of which a small percentage are day pupils. The pre-prep, with 70 boys and girls from the age of three, has its own headteacher who reports to Mr Goddard.

As an independent school it is are subject to a differing system of inspection to Ofsted. Required to comply with the Independent School Inspectorate, schools emerge as excellent, good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. Aysgarth was deemed excellent in 2012.

In the last ten years, they have added and updated facilities that would have other schools green with envy. Mr Goddard says: "In a world

that regards a boarding school as at best odd, at worst deranged, it is a very happy place for young boys.

"As I look around I see many similar schools have changed or closed, whereas we have a happy and vibrant community."

On the single-sex status of the main school he is unequivocal. He says: "The gap between boys' and girls' achievements is widening. It is important parents have a choice.

"Boys are not well served by co-education, although I accept that is not completely the case.

"To educate, children should be in an environment that is least disruptive and where they are free to be who they wish to be. Sometimes they are detrimentally inhibited by the presence of the opposite sex.

"A good example is our choir. At a co-educational school, 90 per cent of a choir will be girls. At Aysgarth we have three choirs and there is competition for places."

As a head of a well-resourced independent school, Mr Goddard is not indifferent to the contrasts with a state school. He comments: "Yes, we are very well resourced here.

"The children are inherently well brought up with privilege and high parental expectations, which can be a burden. Our parents value education.

"I have lived and worked in Teesside and seen when fathers and grandfathers are unemployed, they are brought up with a different ethos. I ask myself if I could really manage a school in that environment.

"However if the basic principles of discipline, high expectations, achievement, and reward are applied, you will educate properly. In the end it is about people and attitude."

During his tenure at the helm of the school he has experienced highs, lows and moments of high stress. He has met Prince Charles, comedian Rory Bremner, and sporting

stars, including cricketer Fred Trueman.

Mark Stroyan is the chair of governors. He says: "Anthony, together with his amazing wife Caroline, have been wonderful for Aysgarth. For more than a decade they have led the school with vision, commitment, creativity and loyalty.

"Together they have laid the foundations of a future full of potential which their successors, Rob and Lottie Morse, are well equipped and excited to develop."

Moving away from the Dales, Mr Goddard plans to advise novice headteachers with the business side of running a school. Apart from the countryside, real ale and cricket, he says he will miss being part of young people's lives at a time when they are full of enthusiasm.

His final comments epitomise his time at the school: "To go back to the founder, the success my wife and I have enjoyed here has been down to the opportunity to carry on his tradition and principles.

"I feel I could look him in the eye as I have met with his amazing standards. It has been a privilege to serve as head at Aysgarth."



Anthony Goddard with a portrait of the Rev Clement Hayles, who founded the school in 1877. Left: the school today.

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