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This year, I will...

Give your teaching an 'MOT' this New Year with Sue Cowley's achievable resolutions

From promising ourselves that we'll join a gym, to reading more or finally tidying out the spare room, come January, many of us make the odd resolution. But, don't forget, New Year's resolutions can also apply to your career. This time of year is a great opportunity to give your teaching an 'MOT' – a quick check up to identify and deal with any bad habits that you've picked up over the past year. Just like 'everyday' resolutions, make sure that your teaching resolutions are realistic and achievable. That way, you're far more likely to stick to them in the longer term.



1 ...stop being a perfectionist
With only 24 hours in a day, and a mile high pile of work to get done, you simply can't do everything to perfection. Work out where your priorities really lie, and also where your time can make the most difference. Do hours spent on detailed marking make a real difference to your children's attainment? Do you need to spend half an hour agonising over that form before you fill it out? Give yourself an honest 'yes' or 'no' to such questions to help you prioritise. Find short cuts that work for you and your children, and don't beat yourself up when you save a little time for yourself.

2 ...pay more attention to the quiet, hard-working children in my class
You know the children – they keep their heads down, get on with their work, and never put a foot out of line. But, these children can sometimes be overlooked in favour of their attention-seeking or misbehaving peers. This year, aim to pay more attention to those children who don't constantly demand it, rather than those who do. Make sure that the silent, hard-working children in your class get plenty of positive praise and rewards. And, by focusing on the behaviour you do want, you should find that your more difficult children start to behave better, too.



3 ...say 'no' and mean it
It's lovely to feel needed, so you say 'yes' when someone asks if you can run a club, bake cakes for the school fair, and sew costumes for the Christmas play. As the saying goes: 'If you want something done, ask a busy person.' That's why people ask you – because they know you'll say 'yes' and actually get it done. But, if the time spent on those 'yes' tasks is eating into your personal life, or into the time you should be spending on classroom tasks, then resolve to say 'no' more often this year.

4 ...stay calm and consistent when dealing with misbehaviour
It's hard to always treat the same behaviour problem in exactly the same way whenever they arise. You deal calmly and easily with children calling out when you're fresh on a Monday morning, but by Friday afternoon it's driving you insane and you're starting to raise your voice. This year, resolve to take a few deep breaths before dealing with misbehaviour. Get control of yourself and your emotions first, before you attempt to control your class. Remember: you don't have to deal with every instance of misbehaviour the moment it happens. Defer your response until you're in a calm frame of mind, and you're sure you can apply the rules consistently.

5 ...take better care of my voice

If you were bothered by sore throats last term, resolve to look after your voice properly this year. Follow my top tips to make sure you treat your voice correctly.

- Drink sips of water throughout the day, and avoid too many cups of tea or coffee.
- Do some vocal warm ups with your class each morning (try a tongue twister or quick song).
- Remember to keep the volume of your voice low when you're addressing the class – save your loud, firm voice for when you really need it.
- Make sure you find lots of non-verbal strategies to get your children's attention, rather than always using your voice.
- And finally, avoid too much whole-class teaching, and get the children to do the majority of the talking.



6 ...stay at home when I'm sick

It's hard to resist the temptation to drag yourself into school, even when you're feeling awful. You want to be there for the children; you don't want your classroom to get messed up while you're away. Plus, you know that if you get behind with your workload, it'll take you ages to catch up. But, there are lots of very good reasons for staying away from school when you're unwell, not least that you won't pass that bug onto all the other staff and children. Resolve to put yourself first this year, so that you're on top of your game when you are in the classroom.



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