



Leadership mantras of 28 best school principals



the formidable challenges of the 21st century.

Many million cusecs of water have flown down the Ganges and other rivers since *EducationWorld* presented the success mantras of India's 25 best school principals four years ago (*EW* March 2007). Since then, education – a subject of marginal interest to most people at the time – has moved from the periphery of the national radar to near centre. Suddenly there is blinding awareness that the country's huge 525 million children and youth population – a dismal failure of the world's first official national family planning programme which has been slyly transformed into a 'demographic dividend' by wisecracks of the Planning Commission and the establishment – could well morph into a demographic disaster unless they are truly educated and skilled to meet

But with the 1.26 million schools of the Central and state governments plagued by inadequate funding, mass teacher apathy and absenteeism, and abysmal learning outcomes as testified by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) of the Mumbai-based NGO Pratham, the onus of raising teaching-learning standards in K-12 education has devolved upon the country's 293,000 private and particularly 175,885 independent or unaided primary-secondaries, some of century plus vintage which against all odds have established global reputations for providing world-class academic and extra-curricular education. Unsurprisingly, private independents have overwhelmingly dominated the annual league tables of India's Most Respected Schools Survey published by *EducationWorld* since 2007.

Against the backdrop of neither the grandly titled Union ministry of human resources development nor government schools being able to rise to the challenge, and growing panic that the country isn't graduating sufficient numbers of adequately educated and skilled youth to sustain the 8 percent annual growth rate of the Indian economy, last month *EducationWorld* once again conducted an informal survey to discover the success mantras of India's best school principals. Based upon institutional knowledge within *EW* (estb. 1999) and after sounding expert opinion in academia, the principals featured in the pages following are undoubtedly successful, though the selection is not exhaustive. Several high-profile principals invited to share their leadership mantras either didn't respond or chose not to for reasons best known to themselves.

Nevertheless there is likely to be a consensus within academia and the knowledgeable public that the principals interviewed for this cover feature have been eminently successful in shaping their schools into islands of excellence. Therefore under the shadow of the RTE Act, 2009 which threatens deep incursions into the autonomy of private schools, learning about their leadership mantras and institutional aspirations is likely to inspire their counterparts in K-12 schools countrywide to find ways and means to cope with the challenges of 21st-century school education in India.

D.N.A. Mountford

Assam Valley School, Balipara

An alumnus of St. Stephen's College, Delhi and the School of African & Oriental Studies of London University, D.N.A. Mountford was appointed headmaster of the Assam Valley School (AVS), Balipara (estb.1995) in 2003. In the 2010 EducationWorld league tables of India's most respected boarding schools, AVS was ranked No.1 in eastern India.



Purpose of school education. Over-whelmingly, to stimulate in young people the belief that life is worth living! Beyond mere academics and examinations, exposure to sport, cultural pursuits and a life of the mind, all adding up to the vital life-skill of acquiring an independent contemporary world-view.

Education thinker/philosopher you admire the most. Bertrand Russell. There's been no finer critic of the 20th century school as the starkest example in modern society of an institution modelled after the industrial-age assembly line. Also, in his time, a great proponent of iconoclastic education.

Differentiating characteristic of AVS. A school that learns at work and in play. We are young, idealistic, unafraid of new ideas and not bound by inert pedagogies and the dogmas of the past. Merge 235 acres of campus greenery in a new age school with unparalleled infrastructure and the best talent of north-east India, that's AVS.

Leadership style. Leadership through action: measurable, tangible, responsible and accountable.

Educational philosophy implementation success. AVS has seasoned, matured and refined my belief in 'engineering the cosmos of the learner'. From great success in implementing the concept of 'pupil-ownership' of events and activities and rapid absorption of technology to link with communities of learners worldwide, the idiom of the engaged 'consumer' (child) and satisfied 'customer' (parent) has enabled all our stakeholders to quickly build an institution of pan-India excellence.

For or against the 25 percent reserved quota under the RTE Act? Laudable in principle, but unfeasible in practice.

Future plans. Several new initiatives in our three-year School Development Plan, including construction of a junior school offering an international curriculum.

Unwind/de-stress. Our children – constant companions, unspoilt, affable and endearing – keep me busy and cheerful.