

Gemma Meek

What were your favourite subjects/best memories from school?

I went on some amazing trips that enhanced my learning. I remember the trip to Normandy in Y8 where I saw the Bayeux tapestry, saw the D-Day landing beaches and war cemeteries. I had lots of opportunities to excel and won awards for the school - the most memorable was when I won the Tony Wilkes award for a scale model of the Technology block that was built in 1998. I had to present my model to several judges and won the award against other schools in Gloucestershire. I had some fantastic teachers (some of whom are still here - Mrs Compton and Mr May) who encouraged me to work hard and pursue my dreams. My favourite subjects were English (obviously haha) and also History and Languages (French and German). I was appointed Deputy Head Girl in my final year at Dene Magna. I had to overcome my shyness to present speeches to parents and students.

What are you currently doing and how did you get there?

I've just been promoted to Director of Curriculum Quality across the Forest of Dean Trust, where I will be working with schools that join our Trust, and also ensuring consistency across all sites. I have been Head of English since 2015 and have loved the job. I have a fantastic department and we have a strong team in place. Prior to this I have worked at three other schools: Newent, John Masefield in Ledbury and Whitecross in Hereford. My career took off in my first few years of teaching after receiving a distinction for my PGCE (I trained at Dene Magna). My first job was in Hereford and was a challenge in terms of managing behaviour but in my second year of teaching, I was given a TLR with responsibility for Student Voice. I left Whitecross and was appointed an Assistant Head of Faculty at John Masefield in Ledbury. I stayed there quite a while because I had my two children whilst working there. I studied for my Masters Degree in Educational Leadership whilst teaching and prior to my PGCE I studied a BA(Hons) in English Literature with creative writing at the University of Gloucestershire.

What is your favourite thing about your career?

I enjoy seeing people succeed and thrive (both staff and students). Seeing the smiling faces of students who leave exams knowing they have tried their best is definitely the highlight of every year. I have wanted to teach from secondary age and so I have no regrets in the career path I have chosen. I enjoy new challenges and so my new role at Dene Magna is exciting because I get to learn new things. I have also been appointed a Team Leader for Eduqas and this enables me to work with teachers from all over the country, whilst also getting insight into the exam process to support students at Dene Magna.

What is your least favourite thing about your career?

The marking! Haha. English teachers mark a lot of work - two separate exams (4 papers for Y11) and two exams for Y13, as well as marking for Y7-Y12. You do get quicker at it though!

What advice would you give to a student wanting a job in your field?

To get some work experience in a school and to see if it's for you. It's not for everyone because it demands a passion for what you teach as well as the ability to motivate and build positive relationships with young people.

How did your experience at Dene Magna help you find your first job?

I built up a lot of confidence at Dene Magna. Not only this but I was also encouraged to do A-levels and go to university by both my teachers and parents (I was the first in my family to go to university).

If you had to do it all over again what would you do differently?

Have the confidence to study at a university away from home.

What do you know now that you wish you knew when you were at school?

That secondary school is something to relish because it starts your career journey. I think when you are young, you tend to want to fast forward life a bit rather than enjoy the varied opportunities that secondary school can bring.