

Professor Tim Brighouse  
Essential Pieces: The Jigsaw of a Successful School  
www.rm.com

Tim Brighouse has legendary status as an enigmatic leader – shambling but hugely effective, personable but quietly tough, and always focused on what’s best for pupils. I can’t claim to have met him or heard him speak, but I immediately warmed to him from this small, free booklet made available by RM (free download with a suggested donation to the Ted Wragg Memorial Fund).

Given Tim Brighouse’s credentials as Director of Education in Oxford and Birmingham, and more recently as Commissioner for London Schools, it’s no surprise that the advice in this book is spot-on. It uses the (unnecessary, to my mind) metaphor of a jigsaw to show the ingredients of a successful school. The corner pieces include getting the language right – talking about “we” rather than “I” (except when taking blame), never using the insulting term “non-teaching staff” - “as offensive as it would be to refer to non-white staff or pupils,” says Brighouse. He knows that it’s often the details that make a school exceptional – making pupils’ toilets civilised, reducing lunchtime queues and having high standards of presentation.

The straight-sided pieces (keep up - this is a jigsaw, remember) include managing complex change, indeed welcoming it, visiting other schools, refusing to make mediocre staffing appointments.

None of it is new, but the clear, simple synthesis in a tone so passionate, so drawn from experience, is a pleasure to read, and a reminder of what great books for teachers should be like.

Geoff Barton is headteacher at King Edward VI School, Suffolk