

# What works in schools



THE PRINCE'S  
TEACHING  
INSTITUTE

Conclusions from the PTI conferences 2017/18



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# Replicating success in schools

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This report, *What works in schools*, is a summary of the discussions that took place at the PTI's Leadership Residential and Primary Leadership Residential for school leaders in 2017/18. It explores the key ingredients of an outstanding school and the ways that this success can be replicated.

The PTI started as a seed of an idea planted by His Royal Highness Prince Charles, as a forum for teachers to come together and reconnect with their passion for the subject that first brought them into teaching.

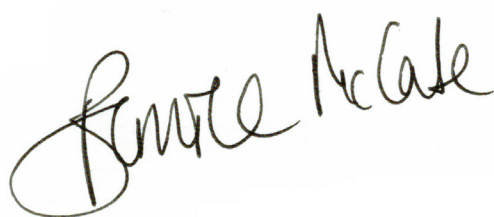
In the time since, thousands of teachers have told us that they believe the most effective teaching is rooted in deep subject knowledge. As the Sutton Trust noted in their 2014 report *What makes great teaching*, "The most effective teachers have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach".

Education exists to open young people's eyes to new opportunities and new horizons and to help them understand the world around them. So to ensure that young people develop into fully rounded adults, keeping the curriculum as broad as possible is essential. The delegates this year were unanimous in voicing their concern at forces that were driving a narrowing curriculum in many schools, both at primary and at secondary levels.

In recent years there has been a shift in power from the local authorities to multi-academy trusts, but all agreed that a school's focus on teaching and learning should remain unchanged. Many roles within a MAT are free from the day-to-day challenges of leading a school and so they provide opportunities to focus on teaching and learning.

Despite the changing educational landscape, the role of a school leader remains to create an ethos in which staff are encouraged to build their own subject knowledge, and confidence to inspire their students. As such we are delighted that our annual Leadership Residential and Primary Leadership Residential continue to provide an important opportunity for school leaders to gain perspective, be reminded of their own principles and refresh the vision they have for their own schools.

The conclusions drawn in this report will continue to inform the work of the PTI.



Bernice McCabe, Co-Director, The Prince's Teaching Institute



**"The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers."**

- McKinsey & Company, *How the world's best performing schools came out on top*, 2007

# A broad curriculum for fully rounded young people

**Delegates concluded that the need to keep the curriculum broad is more pressing than ever, to support young peoples' development and give them the skills they need to succeed.**

- There has been a narrowing of curriculum, driven by a number of factors including an over-emphasis on attainment results.
- In the face of these pressures, it is more important than ever not to lose sight of what is important in a child's education and make the correct decisions, even if they are tough.
- Collaborating with other schools can help ensure that students are offered choice.
- It would be helpful if Ofsted changed its inspections to look more beyond the data and

capture aspects of education that are beyond attainment results.

To enable young people to develop into fully rounded adults, it was agreed that headteachers should:

- engender a spirit of scholarship
- encourage curiosity and ambitious thinking
- facilitate adventure
- develop habits of resilience, determination and grit.

## Secondary school panel

### Subject knowledge

Students felt that the best teachers were those who were passionate about their subject and found opportunities to help students explore a subject beyond school.

Lighter moments in the classroom ensured that the work was not restricted to "teaching for the exam".

For students the balance between studying just for enjoyment and focussing on grades was a fine one; by sixth form the grades that are required for university tended to be the stronger influence.

### Extracurricular work

Students valued the opportunity to become confident, well-rounded people. This included taking leadership roles and engaging in opportunities for performance and public speaking within and outside school.

## Primary school panel

### Assessment

During SAT preparation, students really looked forwards to lessons like PE and Drama that were not part of the assessment, and were disappointed when these subjects were scrapped in favour of revision lessons.

All pupils felt there was too much testing, and one commented that his class did so much preparation they didn't have time to learn anything new.





# Leadership for curriculum excellence at primary level

**Dame Alison Peacock, CEO, Chartered College of Teaching**

- The joy of teaching is to set people up to achieve more than they thought they could, but the challenge for leaders is to create a culture in schools where achievement is encouraged.
- To do this, we need to move beyond labels, because intelligence is not fixed and it can be developed. Great teachers make everything seem within reach.
- It's important to remember the long-lasting impact teachers have on children. We don't always realise it because it's a difficult thing to quantify. An enthusiastic teacher can have a huge impact on a child.
- Teachers should continue to learn so that they are connected to what it is to be a learner and find the best ways to pass on their knowledge.






# Keeping the focus on the main thing: teaching and learning

**Delegates at the Primary and Secondary Leadership Residentials discussed effective ways to keep the focus of their schools on teaching and learning.**

- Student voice is a central and essential element in enabling school leaders to understand the 'real' picture of teaching and learning in their schools.
- A policy of putting teaching and learning at the heart of schools needs to be owned by everyone, but headteachers have the power to drive this focus.
- Empower and invest in middle leaders to help keep focus on teaching and learning.
- Appoint exceptional teachers and leaders, because their judgements have validity and integrity.
- The structure of a MAT and the new role of 'system lead' is not facing the same challenges as headteachers on a daily basis, and there is potential for this role to focus on teaching and learning.
- Fostering a culture without fear, where teachers are willing to take calculated risks can result in huge returns for students.
- Keeping the focus on teaching and learning will require doing less of other things.
- Step back and examine the bigger picture at every stage, and consider what experience we want our students to have.
- Involve staff in quality assurance, and keeping the focus on improvement to make it less daunting.
- Explore developing links between universities and secondary schools that might give teachers opportunities for development.
- A popular idea was giving mini sabbaticals for teachers, where they would be given a week to go and research their subject.

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a black and white striped top, smiling and looking towards the right. She is in a meeting or conference setting, with other people blurred in the background. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**“A policy of putting teaching and learning at the heart of schools needs to be owned by everyone.”**





### **Delegates discussed effective methods of promoting teachers' subject knowledge at primary level.**

- We have a professional responsibility to encourage teachers' own research and development.
- Exploring different staffing structures could exploit staff knowledge, for example by having subject leads teaching across all year groups.
- Collaborating with universities and other schools can provide development opportunities and up-to-date knowledge for students.
- Being flexible with the curriculum and facilitating a culture of risk-taking can open up new opportunities for staff and students.

**“Collaborating with universities and other schools can provide development opportunities.”**

### **Delegates at the Primary Leadership Residential discussed methods for fostering a culture of teaching and learning that goes above and beyond exam requirements.**

- See students as experts and give them space and time to talk and develop their own ideas.
- As school leaders we need to empower teachers who work with us and help them to discover what their passion is.

# The importance of a visionary school ethos

**Delegates concluded that a school's ethos must be modelled, not just stated, at all levels from the governing body down.**

- Embodying an ethos is essential for school leaders to achieve authority – it is school leaders who have to 'walk the walk'.
- Leaders are the embodiment of a school's ethos. A 'top down' ethos is successful if it's reciprocated 'bottom up'.
- Staff need to have a clear understanding of a school's ethos.
- It's important that school leaders have time to reflect to see if what we are doing informs and enhances the ethos of the school.
- The values of a school must be informed by deep understanding of the community.
- There must be synergy between a school's values and the values of governing bodies.

## Creating an identity

**Delia Smith, founding Principal of Ark Academy**

The ingredients of an outstanding school:

- Great lessons
- Strong middle leadership
- Collaboration with other departments
- New staff, who bring new ideas
- Keep teaching and learning as the main focus

Secrets of creating a strong identity:

- To build an ethos, ask questions about who we are and what we stand for at every opportunity, then use that knowledge to sell a vision to potential applicants.
- Teaching is a craft that can always be improved, so professional development is essential.



**“To build an ethos, ask questions about who we are and what we stand for at every opportunity.”**



# The secrets of strong leadership

## Delegates identified four elements of strong leadership:

### Mutual trust

- We must trust our team from the outset.
- Those we lead are appraising us all the time.

### A strong team

- Growing future leaders is as important as finding the right people externally.

### Excellent time management

- Delegate responsibility, and trust others to brief us.

### Looking after ourselves

- Manage press and unsolicited feedback in a way that doesn't sap our energy.



## Leadership across a MAT

- Great leaders have a passion for what they do and are able to communicate this. This applies in a MAT, but communication can be more challenging.
- Giving credit to a school, rather than taking the credit for the MAT, is essential.
- Working as a MAT leader can be very rewarding, as you are often working with great practitioners without distractions that come in the single school environment.

## For the days when you don't feel like a leader

**Helen King, formerly Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police**

### You're not by yourself

- Having a team of passionate and diverse people will give a leader confidence.

### It's OK to be wrong

- Accepting that someone else knows more than you is a sign of strength.

### Keep it real

- Keeping in touch with the realities of your school, and taking responsibility for it, will help you to assess what's working.

## Effective leadership

**Lord Richard Wilson, previously Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service**

- Management and leadership are not the same thing.
- The best leaders believe in their vision as this makes them more persuasive.
- Leaders are rarely thanked, so they must believe in their own vision.
- As a leader it is unwise to ask people to do things that you would not do yourself.
- Appraisal works both ways – a team are always appraising their leader.
- Leaders must concentrate on the most important thing and not get lost in detail.

# Improving teaching practice through research

**Cat Scutt, Director of Education and Research, Chartered College of Teaching**

- Research helps to improve practice, and to evidence the impact of the practice.
- Exploring a topic through research can help to get a better picture of what's happening already.
- Research can be an important way to facilitate improving education provision.
- The focus of research is its impact, but this does not just mean the impact on students – the impact on staff and teacher colleagues is also important.
- Research is an important evaluation tool to consider effective methods – never shun research that shows that an initiative isn't working.
- When starting new research projects, search for existing educational research.
- Disseminating new research with peers will mean that they benefit from its existence and can take on board conclusions that are reached.

## Leadership through research at Sandbach School

**After attending the PTI Leadership Residential in January 2012, Sarah Burns, Headteacher of Sandbach School, addressed areas of inconsistency within her school through her PTI research project.**

Sarah's project used a process of coaching and self-reflection to promote and embed a culture of ongoing professional development. The project aimed to:

- empower staff
- ensure teaching and learning is the mantra of every teacher
- enable staff to better identify their areas for development
- validate professional growth.

Sarah introduced staff lesson observations and a learning log to help teachers to record their process, which was also used by teachers' line managers. Colleagues were encouraged to read other people's logs to build a collaborative culture of learning.

The project had an enormous impact across the school. During the course of one year:

- 100% of staff bought into the process and completed logs.
- 100% of staff sampled lessons of colleagues in other departments during open classroom fortnight.
- Regular student feedback confirmed that they had seen improved consistency within lessons.
- Although results were not a primary measure, GCSE results improved.







## About the PTI

The PTI is working to improve the education of children in England and Wales. We inspire teachers and school leaders to become more effective, enthusiastic and influential by putting subject-centred teaching at the heart of schools.

We help teachers re-discover their love of their subject, inspiring them to bring the latest subject knowledge into their classroom. We support teachers to make lasting improvements in what and how they teach.



The PTI is constituted as a registered charity (1116224) and a company limited by guarantee  
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