



2011

# Headteachers' Conference Report



## **Contents**

---

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Key themes**
- 6 Group discussions and presentations**
- 9 Seminar conclusions**
- 10 Plenary discussion summary**
- 11 Conclusions and next steps**
- 12 Background and acknowledgments**
- 13 Attendees**

# Introduction



The last time that The Prince's Teaching Institute invited a group of Headteachers to come together to exchange ideas about What Works in Schools was in January 2010. What the discussions on that occasion highlighted was the tension between the aspirations of Heads to provide a challenging academic curriculum and the imperative to work within what they perceived as a prevailing culture of narrow accountability. There was wide agreement that many of the issues that dominated the thinking at the time about the function of schools were concerned more with a social than with an educational agenda, and that the dissemination of subject knowledge was being diluted as a result.

Since that time there has been a change of Government and a shift in the direction of educational policy away from these orthodoxies. This change in emphasis in thinking about the function of education has been accompanied by a shift in responsibility too, away from centrally directed initiatives towards greater freedom in individual schools. To quote the White Paper (The Importance of Teaching) published in November 2010, "We will not approach every issue or problem with the starting assumption that another government directive, circular or statutory duty is the answer. Instead we will make sure that Headteachers and teachers feel empowered to do what they think is right, know where they can go for support if they want it, and are accountable for the results they achieve."

So, this year it seemed appropriate to ask the fundamental question of Heads: how did they view the purpose of education? How would they want to use new freedoms? What would their objectives be for their schools, and how would they set about achieving them?

The answers that came out of the discussions were unequivocal: that pupils' depth of learning and understanding was more important than breadth, that this deep learning can and should be at the heart of any school's fabric, and that school success and improvement depended on having a supply of passionate teachers who were trained and constantly developed in order to enthuse another generation with their own love of subject. There was unanimity that schools needed to be accountable, and that pupil attainment needed to be measured, but it was felt that the current systems of assessment and inspection still seemed to be largely concerned with compliance and meeting targets.

A secondary question which the delegates were invited to consider was whether they saw a worthwhile role for The Prince's Teaching Institute in creating a leadership programme for Heads, mirroring the highly successful PTI Schools Programme which has reinvigorated so many academic departments up and down the country, and if so what they would like to see it foster. The response was again strongly positive. The flipside of autonomy is isolation and many Heads said that they would greatly value having access to a forum which brought them together with Heads from differing schools, academics, researchers and other educational experts from across the country to help them to provide the best possible teaching and learning environment for the children under their care.

The Heads expressed, unanimously and in the warmest terms, their appreciation for being invited to take part in this Conference, and their suggestions have given us many ideas to carry forward.

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

# Key themes

**The Headteachers agreed that the purpose of education is to provide students with a preparation for and understanding of the world around them. In this context, there was strong consensus that a pupil's depth of learning and understanding is more important than breadth, and that deep learning could only come about if there is a relentless focus on teaching and learning at all levels in a school, from the Senior Leadership Team down. It was seen as critical that Heads establish an ethos of high aspirations, expectations and professional standards for both teachers and students, and that at the centre of a school's fabric should be a curriculum that embraces challenging material and processes that encourage carefully considered subject choices for pupils of all abilities. Four key themes emerged from the discussions: Curriculum, Staffing and Professional Development, Leadership and Attainment, Assessment and Accountability.**



## Curriculum

“Wanting success for all pupils in a complex world”, the Heads agreed that “the curriculum should be designed around the needs of the student, not of the school”. Emphasising the need to embrace challenging pathways for all students which promote depth of learning and which do not “impair life chances”, delegates concluded that:

- It was important to provide the best possible advice to parents and students at Key Stage 4 and 5 option points to ensure that the students are “afforded the best possible destinations”
- Lack of rigour and depth in exams could be compensated for by using Key Stage flexibility and devoting more time to Key Stage 4
- Vocational options were the best for “a very few students”.

It was felt that all students should be entitled to “access the high-performing elements of the curriculum” and some of the Heads present felt it was correct to “take more risks around challenging material and subject choices”, even if these were to the detriment of their schools’ league table performance.

The delegates had the following thoughts about future development:

- Universities and FE colleges need to ensure that their courses’ content and depth are well attuned to qualification for entry to the professions, with school curricula acting as appropriate preparation in terms of the rich content and depth of thinking required
- Suitable pathways are required for the lower ability range; perhaps a lower level English Bacc as in Wales
- Subject-enhancing extracurricular activities should be positively encouraged
- Clusters and local networks to develop subject knowledge should be fostered.

## Staffing and Professional Development

The Headteachers were unanimous in stating that attracting, retaining and developing good staff are of paramount importance, and one of the principal aims of the Head must be to create a critical mass of teachers who will promote and reinforce the values of the school. They felt that teachers should be appointed who have a demonstrable passion for their subject as well as a desire to communicate it to their pupils. The challenges of recruitment were discussed and two conclusions were drawn:

- It is better not to appoint and make do with temporary cover than to appoint someone who is not going to be up to the job
- Strategies for recruitment need to be proactive, involving other staff and requiring first class documentation and website presence.

The idea of becoming a Teaching School presented obvious attractions (embed the culture in Initial Teacher Trainees and take first pick), and the feeling was that retention is best achieved not just through recognition and reward but also by having a clear and coherent policy of performance management, support and professional development. In particular, it was felt that more departments should be encouraged to engage with subject-specific CPD.

The Headteachers also articulated the need for “us to seek our own professional development as Heads” and expressed the feeling that the Residential had reassured them about their core values and made them more confident about the idea of “ditching marginal issues”. They felt this was valuable and that it was important to have the opportunity to discuss important issues and seek advice from their peers, hear from high quality speakers, and have access to educational research. They were unanimous in their request that the PTI continue a forum of professional development for Headteachers to achieve these aims.

“We should encourage more departments to look at the more subject specific CPD courses that are out there.”

## Leadership

According to the analysis of Professor Keith Grint, many of the main problems in schools do not have a ‘right’ solution and central directives are often inappropriate for dealing with them. This places a greater responsibility upon individual Heads for determining the ethos of their own school. The Headteachers agreed that it was essential to articulate with clarity the vision of how the best teaching and learning is to be achieved, and how to create the culture and build the team which will enable them to open doors most effectively for their pupils. Good behaviour management and unwavering focus on teaching and learning at all levels of the school were seen as the essential elements. It was felt that it was the Head’s responsibility to “set the example and insist on high professional standards at all times”.

The Heads expressed the strong view that a relentless focus on teaching and learning should be at the heart of good leadership at all levels of the school. With this in mind, a different focus on developing middle leaders and aspiring Heads is needed – those who put the emphasis on the curriculum, teaching and learning. It was stressed that improving teaching and learning needed to be at the heart of both the Middle Leadership and Senior Leadership Teams, whatever the success of the school, and many of the Heads felt that they needed to refocus their senior teams on teaching and learning. At the Senior Leadership Team level “it is so easy only to pay lip-service to teaching and learning”.

The delegates identified some of the challenges:

- Giving priority to securing depth of learning by showing personal commitment and ensuring a continuing dialogue about pedagogy
- Creating coherent pathways for staff and students
- Developing Heads of the future and mentoring new Heads.

## Attainment, Assessment and Accountability

The Headteachers agreed that schools needed to be accountable, and that they needed to have clear processes in place to track pupils' attainment. However, there was concern that the use of examination results to determine whole-school performance measures had resulted in schools becoming adept at meeting government targets while leaving Heads with the feeling that "their ability to do what is right for their pupils and communities has been constrained". The point was made that it was unfortunate that the more generalised adoption of BTECs had put them at risk of being discredited as they "do provide their own rigour for some students". They felt that the time is right for a thorough review of Inspection and other forms of assessment; and teachers, academics and leaders of subject associations must make their views known.

The delegates identified the following current issues:

- Confusion over what constitutes rigorous standards; the English Bacc on its own is not enough
- Uncertainty over the implications of keeping or dropping AS level
- The need to disassociate Exam Boards from publishing companies, and to study the effect of commercial competition between Boards
- The future thrust of Inspection; Ofsted is currently accountable to too many bodies.

## Leadership in Education

Keith Grint, Professor of Public Leadership and Management, Warwick Business School

In general:

- 'Critical' problems require the 'Commander', to take immediate and decisive action to deal with the problem, with no time for discussion or dissent
- 'Tame' problems require 'Management'; these are puzzles which, even if complicated, can be and have been solved, and there is therefore an accessible solution which is a matter of engaging the appropriate process
- 'Wicked' problems have no definable solution; one 'solution' may just create more problems. So they are a matter for coping rather than solving, with a need for 'leadership' rather than 'management', to ask the right questions and try to secure collective consent.

There is a paradox in that, while education presents many problems in the 'wicked' category and governments call for leadership in schools, they actually tend to treat the problems as 'tame' ones and seek to impose their own management solutions.

"I will invest even more time in developing new innovative approaches to nurturing my good teachers."

“We have definitely got to focus on the curriculum.”



## Group discussion summaries

### **What is the purpose of education?**

The Headteachers concluded that the purposes of education are multiple and overlapping, and identified the following:

- Developmental: the enhancement of knowledge, skills, attitudes and creativity
- Social: broadening sympathies and perspectives, making a positive contribution to social cohesion and social improvement
- Moral: raising aspirations and expectations, and enabling potential.

### **Why are we Headteachers?**

The reasons for being Headteachers were to:

- Open doors and create opportunities for all
- Generate enthusiasm and passion
- Develop a culture and climate in which education will flourish
- Set an example of moral integrity, self-belief, responsibility and accountability.

### **Can subjects be at the heart of school improvement?**

There was a consensus among delegates that subjects can be at the heart of school improvement. It was felt that subjects provide the best context for acquiring knowledge, skills and values. However, the Heads also stated that there is a need to:

- Counter the negative influence of the compliance culture
- Recruit and develop good quality teachers
- Pay more attention to what is taught in Primary Schools.

Heads found that there are also problems with:

- The perceived hierarchy of subjects
- Agreeing what constitutes improvement and how it is to be judged.

### **How do we develop and sustain passionate teachers?**

Delegates suggested that to achieve this they should:

- Appoint teachers who have a demonstrable passion for their subject as well as a desire to communicate it
- Identify the best teachers and departments and share their good practice
- Set up exchanges, visits and lesson observations within the school and with other schools
- Provide constant opportunities for revitalisation and allocate regular and significant blocks of time for subject-based CPD
- Make the staff feel valued and supported
- Develop links and a two-way dialogue with HE
- As Heads, show an interest in what teachers bring back from their CPD, be prepared to take some risks with the curriculum, and set a good personal example, (e.g. by not giving Power Point lectures in a monotone).

## Subject Rigour, Enthusiastic Teachers and Effective Classroom Management

**Sir Paul Grant, Headteacher, Robert Clack School**

At the heart of every outstanding school is outstanding teaching and learning. The challenge is to provide children from a depressed urban environment with the educational opportunities and benefits enjoyed by pupils in more favoured schools.

This can be achieved through:

### **1 Subject rigour, cultivated by having:**

- Subject specialist teachers with an opportunity and an appetite to develop their subject knowledge
- The school's Leadership Team (including the Head) personally involved in lesson observation
- Links with the PTI, subject associations and Universities
- A curriculum that gives prominence to the key academic subjects and is enriched by visiting speakers, educational visits and related extracurricular activities.

### **2 Enthusiastic teachers, the result of:**

- Having themselves been taught well and enthusiastically
- Being carefully monitored and encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills continuously
- Being given responsibility for staff INSET
- Being properly rewarded.

### **3 Effective classroom management**

The disciplines of good learning and good behaviour are interlinked. At Robert Clack School the Good Lesson is central, and all activities and individuals are involved in supporting it.

### **What curriculum maximises pupils' life chances?**

Heads present identified a need to:

- Insist on depth and quality
- Set the sights high for Higher Education, while at the same time choosing appropriate pathways, including the vocational and creative, and insisting on high standards in these areas too
- Manage parental expectations
- Place the interests of the individual student above those of the school and its League Table position
- Accept that the English Bacc idea symbolises a commitment to rigour, even if it is in some respects inhibiting
- Concentrate as much on the excellent (A\*/A) as on the borderline (C/D).

### **What impact will the Conference have had on the way you do or think about your job as Head?**

Delegates' conclusions were that they should:

- Pay less attention to compliance unless it benefits teaching and learning
- Make sure that the Senior and Middle Leadership Teams focus on teaching and learning
- Take a more active role as Heads in monitoring teaching and learning, and include student feedback in the monitoring process
- Focus on deep learning rather than breadth
- Focus on developing aspiring leaders
- Pay more attention to their own professional development as Heads in the area of teaching and learning
- Get staff to do more subject-based CPD, and think more strategically about its use
- Embed consistent leadership values in every level of the school
- Be uncompromising about standards
- Create more opportunities for collaborative working, inside and outside the school
- Have the courage of personal convictions and be more prepared to take risks.

## Refining the National Curriculum in England

Tim Oates, Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment

- Educational policy is subject to a variety of control factors which determine the character of different national systems of education, e.g curriculum, assessment, institutional structure, funding and governance
- The educational system in England is large and complex, making change difficult (though possible) since all the control factors have to be aligned
- The direction of educational change in England has been confused by the QCA's talk of an 'up to date and motivating curriculum', muddling the centrally determined content of a National Curriculum with the role of pedagogy in individual schools where it is delivered - a confusion between the National curriculum and the school curriculum
- There is a need to focus on curriculum coherence and on concepts and principles, arranged in an age-related framework
- International comparisons are important, but need to take account of the different social contexts and control factors.

# Transformation

**Sir Michael Wilshaw, Principal, Mossbourne Academy**

The Head is a kind of Lone Warrior, who has to deal with the Good, the Bad and the Not So Sure. The Good is seen in success based on:

- Signing up to the culture
- Accepting no excuses for low aspirations and achievement
- Being, where necessary, surrogate parents and providing the structure that enables the pupil to achieve liberation
- Careful tracking of performance
- The transforming agents: autonomy, universal accountability and competition.

The Bad is exemplified by:

- Defending the indefensible
- Poor leadership
- Not challenging the status quo
- Not putting Teaching and Learning first
- Worrying about marginal issues
- Not telling it as it is.

Not So Sure: what good (apart from bits of extra funding) came from initiatives such as the New Deal, Education Action Zones, Excellence in the City, Every Child Matters, Personalised Learning and the National Strategies?

Centralised directives should only be respected for what they contribute to teaching and learning and it is the responsibility of the Headteacher to ensure a focus on the Good.



# Seminar summaries

**Developing a culture of learning and good behaviour** led by Andrew Linnell, Head Teacher, Desborough School  
Discussion among the Headteachers reached the conclusion that the key problem is to make a clear statement of values that embraces both learning and behaviour, and also gives sufficient scope for individual teachers. They felt that the aim is to create a virtuous cycle in which success is regarded as legitimate and a variety of expectations is met.

**Raising expectations for all pupils** led by George Berwick CBE, Head Teacher, Ravens Wood School  
Delegates concluded that:

- Heads have to manage the different sort of expectations that parents may have of their children without necessarily having any commitment to help them achieve, and those of staff, which may be more modest but will help the pupils to achieve
- The best instrument for raising pupil expectations is the peer group in which no-one wants to be left behind.

**Developing rigorous and enthusiastic teaching** led by Catherine McCormack, Head Teacher, South Wirral High School

The Headteachers stated that in addition to consideration of what the characteristics are of rigorous and enthusiastic teaching, it is important to consider the student perspective and the impact that their engagement may have; and also to look at models from other professions to help us to sustain and develop the initial enthusiasm of new staff.

**Recruitment and training of staff: what's important?** led by Delia Smith OBE, Principal, ARK Academy

The seminar group agreed that:

- The most important thing is to maintain a critical mass of good teachers who will reinforce the values of the school; this requires rigorous performance management as well as professional development
- Difficulties of recruitment will be exacerbated by the return of a more benign economic climate, the increase of student indebtedness, and the simple shortage of graduates in subjects like Physics (regardless of whether or not they become teachers).

## Raising aspirations and offering a challenging curriculum for all

Jerry Collins, Principal, Pimlico Academy

The main ingredients are:

### 1 Shared vision

- Excellence in all aspects of school life
- Breadth and coherence of study
- Creativity and invention
- Independence of mind
- Openness of enquiry

2 High aspirations, consistently pursued by Governors, School Leadership Team, Staff and Students (encouraged by visiting speakers, mentoring, links with HE, and extracurricular activities)

3 Support for staff and students in the pursuit of good teaching and learning, coupled with awareness of expectations and accountability

4 Carefully managed subject choice, based on accurate information and experienced guidance. In this context, Pimlico Academy is putting depth before breadth, and is developing a coherent, cumulative, rich and content-specific curriculum.

# Plenary panel discussion summary

---

Chaired by **Bernice McCabe** with

**Michael Chisnall**, Her Majesty's Inspectors, OFSTED

**Jon Coles**, Director General for Education Standards, DfE

**Liz Francis**, Workforce Strategy Standards and Qualifications Director, TDA

**Elizabeth Reid**, Chief Executive, SSAT

The key points arising from the panel discussion are summarised below.

## **Deep learning**

*The discussion identified four areas that can help foster deep learning:*

- Recruiting teachers with a passion for their subject; then sustaining the passion, for example by links with subject associations, HE and the PTI
- Getting the organisation and the individual going hand in hand, e.g. through institutional involvement with ITT and through personal CPD
- Relating everything done to this context (for example induction and performance management) so as to create the right culture. Heads should not be deflected from their values by the system; this is largely up to the school leadership, making sure that teachers and departments are held rigorously to account. The government's influence in this area has been limited; but it can help with partnership schemes
- Remembering that individual teachers do also have responsibility for their own development; it can't all be done for them.

## **Qualifications and modes of assessment**

It was felt that the exam system has tended recently to place too much emphasis on such things as reliability at the expense of valid evaluation of deep understanding, but that the pendulum is swinging back. It was suggested that subject associations, HE and the PTI should be involved in revising assessment – although difficulties with HE because of the diversity of views and perspectives in that sector were highlighted. With the reduction of externally agreed targets (through, for instance, the demise of School Improvement Partners), there was seen to be a heavier onus on schools to work out what they are going to do for their pupils and how. It was stated that many schools find that Ofsted inspections still place too much emphasis on compliance and are a distraction from the school's main purposes. It was pointed out that this may change in the light of the intention declared in the November White Paper to concentrate inspection on fewer and more significant aspects, and the launch of a consultation to consider a new framework.

## **Recruitment and retention of high quality teachers**

The current cohort of Newly Qualified Teachers was reckoned to be the best ever; but it was pointed out that they still need developing, and much of the responsibility will fall on schools as the PGCE can only achieve a certain amount. The schools themselves were also considered to need external support, for example to help them keep up to date in Science, and it was felt that this should provide an incentive to form fruitful partnerships.

Passion for their subject is what draws many into teaching, and the opportunity to develop this passion was identified as one thing that makes the career attractive. Recruitment will probably become harder as economic prosperity returns and the levels of student indebtedness increase, and it was suggested that this can best be countered by the profession making itself as attractive as possible. The Teach First project was identified as having done a fine job of doing this.



## Reflections and next steps

---

All delegates filled in a detailed evaluation form at the end of the conference. Their comments were overwhelmingly positive and their suggestions constructive.

There was unanimous agreement that attending the Conference had been a valuable experience and would have an impact on individual schools. Delegates requested that the PTI should disseminate the conclusions of the Conference to the educational community and that it should run similar events in the future.

Every delegate expressed interest in joining any PTI Schools Leadership Programme that might result from the Conference.

Delegates concluded that the most valuable elements of the programme were:

- The sharing of expertise from a diversity of backgrounds
- The unswerving commitment to subjects
- The focus on teaching and learning in real terms
- Consideration of leadership in a wider context
- The quality of the outside speakers, as experts in their field and also being close to the making of policy
- The view from students.

The Headteachers suggested that the PTI explore the following:

- A strategic role as ‘honest brokers’ between schools and government agencies, and between schools and HE
- A Leadership Programme, mirroring the Schools Programme for subject teachers
- Subject support in Initial Teacher Training
- The creation of clusters and local networks of schools
- Rigour and challenge in non-core subjects, especially the creative arts
- A wider range of professional development courses
- The dissemination of a digest of recent papers and publications.

# Background and acknowledgments

Building on previous Prince's Teaching Institute Headteacher Conferences, the PTI decided to run a two-day residential in 2011, to allow a more detailed exploration of good school leadership. With a view to providing delegates with practical ideas for improving leadership in their schools, these key questions were explored:

- Why are we headteachers?
- What is the purpose of education?
- What constitutes good leadership?
- What is the place of subjects in school leadership?
- How do we nurture and sustain passionate teachers?
- How do we carry forward the conclusions of this conference?

The days consisted of plenary presentations designed to provide delegates with food for reflection and debate; also break-out seminars, round table discussions and, to conclude, a plenary discussion. Four principal themes emerged from the conference discussions. These were Curriculum, Staffing, Leadership, and Attainment/Assessment/Accountability. This report summarises the conclusions of the conference under these four headings, as well as detailing the responses of the delegates to the questions posed in their round-table discussions. It also provides a brief summary of key points made in the breakout seminars and by the plenary speakers, and summarises the final plenary discussion.

Reports from previous years' conferences can be found at [www.princes-ti.org.uk](http://www.princes-ti.org.uk).

The PTI would like to thank the Headteacher Group Leaders for helping shape the conference and for their leadership during the event: George Berwick CBE, Jerry Collins, Sir Paul Grant, Andrew Linnell, Catherine McCormack, Delia Smith OBE and Sir Michael Wilshaw.

It would also like to thank UBS for its support of the event, the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education, and the speakers and panellists who gave their time and expertise: Michael Chisnall, Jon Coles, Liz Francis, Professor Keith Grint, Tim Oates, Elizabeth Reid, Lord Wilson of Dinton GCB.



Elizabeth Allen  
George Berwick CBE  
Peter Binding  
Martin Burgess  
Sarah Burns  
Hilda Clarke  
Jerry Collins  
Sara Davey  
Simon Decker  
Joan Deslandes  
Lesley Farmer  
Joan Fitz-Gibbon  
Edwina Gleeson  
Sir Paul Grant  
Michael Griffiths  
Paul Hayman  
Caroline Haynes  
Andrew Hemmings  
Rob Higgins  
Mark Housden  
Harry Ingham  
Jack Jackson  
Terence James  
Mark Johnson  
Anthony Lamberton  
Andrew Linnell  
George Lloyd  
Sheila Major  
Rachael Mathey  
Catherine McCormack  
Helena Mills  
Andrew Moss  
Rhonda Murthar  
Keith Nancekievill  
Jonathan Oliver  
Martin Pearman  
Sue Pryor  
Carolyn Roberts  
Dana Ross-Wawrzynski  
Tony Ryan  
Malvina Sanders  
Chris Seward  
Benjamin Slade  
Mary Smith  
Delia Smith OBE  
Paul Strong  
Gill Taylor  
Geoffrey Thompson  
Julie Tridgell  
Michael Tull  
Ann Webster  
David Wheeldon  
Angela Williams  
Sir Michael Wilshaw  
Frances Wilson  
Ian Wilson

Newstead Wood School for Girls  
Ravens Wood School  
Worle School  
Shuttleworth College  
Sandbach School  
Tiffin School  
Pimlico Academy  
Mounts Bay School  
Rainham Mark Grammar School  
Kingsford Community School  
Hailsham Community College  
Penwortham Girls' High School  
Newport Girls' High School  
Robert Clack School  
Northampton School for Boys  
Westcliff High School for Girls  
Tendring Technology College  
The Bushey Academy  
Charles Darwin School  
Oakwood Park Grammar School  
The Community College Whitstable  
Launceston College  
Queens' School  
St Angela's Ursuline School  
Christleton High School  
Desborough School  
The Wycombe and Chess Valley Grange  
Manor High School  
Isambard Community School  
South Wirral High School  
Burnt Mill School  
Gordon's School  
Stewards School  
Hinchingsbrooke School  
Wye Valley School  
Ripon Grammar School  
Swakeleys School  
Durham Johnston Comprehensive School  
Altrincham Grammar School for Girls  
Chiswick Community School  
Cardinal Newman Catholic School  
Davenant Foundation School  
The Manor - A Foundation School  
Maidstone Grammar School for Girls  
Ark Academy  
William Farr CofE Comprehensive School  
Ivybridge Sports & Community College  
Mill Hill County High School  
Nova Hreod  
Marsden Heights Community College  
Bushloe High School  
King Edward VI Five Ways School  
Ysgol Rhiwabon  
Mossbourne Academy  
Small Heath School  
Plashet School

