



# Primary Headteachers' Residential

1st-2nd October 2015  
Oatlands Park Hotel, Surrey  
Post-conference report



## Themes

Three main themes emerged from headteachers' discussions over the two days:

- Promoting passion for subjects and developing teacher expertise – inspiration, not administration
- The importance of pupil voice – what do pupils actually think, and what have they really taken away from lessons?
- Breadth in the curriculum – how can we engender a joy of learning across the subject spectrum, and how meaningful is the curriculum in our schools?



This two-day conference was attended by headteachers from different types of primary schools across the country. Presentations were made by subject specialists in English, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography, and these were followed by roundtable discussions about enriching the quality of subject teaching in the primary sector. The conference began with a pupil panel, and was concluded by a plenary discussion.

## Conclusions

The delegates felt this PTI conference had inspired them as leaders to focus on subject leadership, to promote passionate, rigorous and inspirational teaching which would ignite pupils' joy of learning and develop mastery across a broad range of subjects.



## Concluding plenary discussion

with Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers



Key points raised by delegates:

- Curriculum design and subject leadership are vital – it is crucial to tap into teachers' passions and expertise. Staff need to be developed, to be in touch with outside expertise and have time to observe and be out of lessons.
- Teaching should be for mastery – ensuring that children have excellent opportunities in every subject and that they fully grasp basic concepts.
- We must listen to our pupils – children enter school with so much wonder in the world, and we must not squash it out, but instead develop their joy for learning.
- It is important to make the most of the richness of our surroundings and take learning outside the classroom.

## Developing subject leadership

Delegates suggested the following:

- Use local expertise, including secondary schools, although there are financial implications to this.
- Create an open culture that allows teachers to say where they need support.
- Ignite passion in subject teaching to create a ripple effect throughout the school, in that subject and in others, and allow subject leaders to flourish through professional development – expertise is a driver for improvement.

Russell Hobby reflected:

- The renaissance of subject knowledge is very powerful as a means of enthusing teachers.
- Some of our current approaches to leadership development are questionable - curriculum leadership is often taken for granted but actually it is the most inspiring aspect. We neglect teaching in leadership and lean towards performance management.
- Policymakers' approach to subject knowledge and conceptual understanding has been 'top down', what is being talked about here is totally different – mastery and the joy of learning.
- This conference is on the leading edge in thinking about the importance of curriculum leadership, but it is not isolated – the feeling is growing.

## The importance of curriculum breadth and the joy of learning

Delegates felt that:

- This conference has focused on knowledge and rigour, but through enjoyment. The focus in schools should not be on narrow outcomes.
- Stimulated and excited children will achieve. There's a need to create memorable experiences like trips.
- Love of learning needs to be developed at primary school.
- Curricular breadth also empowers subject leaders and makes children and staff both active learners.

Russell Hobby agreed:

- There's a risk that the current vision of literacy is form without substance – there's a narrow focus on phonics and grammar rather than content.
- English and Maths are vital but there's a need to relate them to other subjects and the real world.
- Education is not a zero-sum game. It's important to recognise that students may learn more about writing from a day out than from a day revising for SATs.



## Dame Alison Peacock DBE – *Leadership for curriculum excellence*

Alison Peacock is Executive Headteacher of the Wroxham School and co-author of *Learning without Limits*



A rich curriculum, expertly taught, helps create an ambitious learning environment for every child:

- A broad curriculum can open the path to success for pupils who might otherwise be stifled
- Not being constricted by exam pressure and creating space to ask deeper questions is crucial
- For this, teachers must have the pedagogical subject knowledge to teach confidently

Do you really know the strengths of your teachers?

- Look beyond the weaknesses of enthusiastic teachers and support them in their passions
- A passionate teacher can inspire others at school and generate excitement for a subject in the community

Make use of the school's environment for learning:

- Build a Celtic Roundhouse, plant vegetables, keep chickens!

## English - Professor Morag Styles

### *Developing a passion for reading and writing poetry*

Professor Morag Styles is Emeritus Professor of Children's Poetry at the University of Cambridge

- Effective poetical education is dependent on the poetical education of the teacher
- Children have a natural instinct for the rhythm of poetry, often experienced first through nursery rhymes, and the oral/performative should never be ignored in teaching
- Too often, formal elements (e.g. form, structure and literary devices) become the focus and the joy and humour of poetry is lost
- There's always time to fit poetry into the day



### Why do we teach English?

Delegates concluded that English is taught: *"To unlock children's ability to express their world; to creatively communicate and articulate what's within and around them; to be immersed and engaged in the joy of language; to open the gateway to all learning."*



## History and Geography

Professor Justin Champion, President of the Historical Association and Dr Paula Owens, Curriculum Development Leader (primary) at the Geographical Association gave presentations about the teaching of their subjects at primary level, which emphasised the need to:

- Balance systematic learning with the exploratory and flexible
- Maximise opportunities that allow students to make their own discoveries
- Take learning outside the classroom and make use of primary sources
- Relate geographical and historical learning to children's own environment and experience

## Pupil panel

The conference opened with three pupils from three different primary schools, now a month into secondary school, reflecting on their experiences of primary education.



### They enjoyed:

- Subjects that were active, like PE, Music, Drama and Performing Arts
- History – exciting topics like Greek mythology, heroes and the Tudors
- English – when it involved drama, e.g. *Treasure Island* and pirates
- Trips that were fun and educational, e.g. visiting the Tower of London and the Jurassic Coast
- Investigations and conducting their own research, e.g. finding out what aspects of the pirates topic were really true

### They did not enjoy:

- Too heavy a focus on English and Maths
- Too many writing tasks

Students said that in the last couple of years of primary school, the focus had been on English and Maths and that time spent on other subjects had been reduced or eliminated as a result. They wished they could have done more:

- Science, especially practical experiments
- PE and Performing Arts, including Drama, Dance and Music
- Music within lessons, not just after school



### Students had a strong sense of fairness and felt that:

- It was not fair to miss out on school trips due to bad behaviour, as this resulted in missed learning opportunities
- Mixing abilities would ensure that students could benefit from working together
- It was important to have somebody in the school who could help those being bullied

### A good teacher was someone who:

- Pushed students to achieve good grades and directed them towards subjects they could excel in
- Was supportive and gave time to individuals
- Helped to review their work and suggested ways to improve it

### Students commented on their transition to secondary school:

- Having strong Maths and English skills was good preparation
- Their teachers had made secondary school sound scarier than it was
- Being taught a variety of discreet subjects each day was enjoyable



# Mathematics

## Shahed Ahmed – *How can we promote and support high quality Mathematics teaching?*

Shahed Ahmed is Headteacher of Elmhurst Primary School, London

A visit to Shanghai, where students are 2-3 years ahead of the UK in Maths by age 15, and where the achievement gap between students of different backgrounds is much smaller, revealed that:

- Maths teachers are engaging and passionate, and always maths specialists
- They teach fewer hours than in the UK and have more time for preparation
- Classes are of mixed ability and there are high expectations for every child
- Attitudes towards mathematics in wider society are positive
- Teaching is for **mastery** and **deep understanding** of concepts that can then be applied with confidence. This involves:
  - Spending much more time on understanding basic concepts, initially in non-abstract ways, relating mathematical concepts to the physical world long before expressing them in numerical terms
  - Using a variety of practical aids to understand concepts: pictures, cutting out, etc.



## Garrod Musto – *Mathematics outside the box*

Garrod Musto is a chartered Maths teacher and Fellow of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications

Students can be engaged in mathematics through:

- Exploring numbers and patterns, maths in art and maths through the ages
- Real-life examples of mathematics, such as infographics, architecture and programming
- Parents speaking about how they use maths in their everyday lives



## *What is high quality Maths teaching?*

In their discussions, delegates concluded that high quality Maths teaching requires:

- Strong understanding, confidence and enthusiasm from the teacher
- Concepts rooted in the concrete rather than the abstract
- Assessment that is formative and confidence building to check that concepts are understood before moving on
- Investment in teacher expertise through professional development and/or partnerships with external institutions

# Science

## Anne Goldsworthy - Teaching Science in the primary classroom

To get the most out of science at primary level:

- Start by arousing students' curiosity, for example by using a digital microscope or creating art from science
- Find out their starting points - expose their misconceptions (with sensitivity) and use the different ideas that emerge to engage the class in scientific discovery
- Develop scientific skills through games and exciting activities
- Use a variety of recording and assessment methods, e.g. videos, peer interviews, drawings - this doesn't always have to involve writing

# Conference Participants

## Leaders

Dame Alison Peacock DBE	The Wroxham School
Jo Newman	North London Collegiate School
Shahed Ahmed	Elmhurst Primary School
Jane Bass	Powers Hall Academy
Nicola Coupe	Burbage Primary School




## Delegates

Jill Augustin	Handsworth Primary School
Mary Bickerstaff	Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary School
Jon Bishop	Brady Primary School
Jennifer Cruse	Pashley Down Infant School
Ian Doswell	Ark Academy
Cathy Hales	Histon and Impington Infant School
Helen Lorimer	Histon and Impington Junior School
Joy Parke	St Mary Magdalene Academy
Ann Pratt	Twydall Primary School
Maria Stegenwalner	St Mary's Primary School
Tess Trewinnard	Wonersh and Shamley Green CofE Aided Primary School
Anne Vickers	Woodlands Primary School
Anthony Welch	Holland Park Primary School
Gill Westbrook	Bishop Winnington-Ingram CofE Primary School
Anna Yates	Colvestone Primary School





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