



What Works In Schools

**And how is success
to be replicated?**

Report on the conclusions reached by secondary Headteachers at
a seminar held on 3 December 2008 at Kensington Palace



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Introduction

The Prince's Teaching Institute is committed to promoting the timeless values that underpin good teaching: the ability to introduce subjects with enthusiasm and drive, the commitment to provide all pupils with a subject-based curriculum, rigorously taught, and the inspiration to offer an ambitious education that encourages all pupils to make the most of their gifts.

As part of its programme, the Institute in December 2008 brought together a group of successful state school Heads to hear their views on what made their schools work so well and how the successes they had achieved could be replicated elsewhere.

This was a major opportunity to learn from Heads what they consider to be important and, as you would expect when a number of Heads come together, there was vigorous debate and a good range of opinions expressed. Nevertheless a strong consensus emerged at the end of the day's discussions.

The general view among the Heads present was that success in schools depends above all upon having leaders with the confidence to use their freedom in pursuit of academic and pastoral excellence; leaders with a willingness to innovate and take some risks, with clarity of vision, good communication skills, a positive outlook which makes staff feel valued and encouraged, and the courage to focus on realising the vision and shake off what one called "the cold hand of conformity and compliance".

The principal aim of these Heads was to establish consistently high standards of teaching and learning in their schools. This in their view requires the recruitment of excellent teachers who are excited by their subject, the development of these teachers through subject-based professional development and Masters programmes, raising the standard of literacy among pupils coming on from Primary Schools, setting high expectations for all students both within and beyond the curriculum, and a programme of extra-curricular activities that is challenging and subject-related, and provides additional opportunities for success.

Looking at the other side of the picture, the Heads were in agreement that one of the biggest obstacles in the way of achieving success in schools is having to address a stream of new central initiatives which do not seem to be informed by any coherent underpinning philosophy. Also, they found an overemphasis on targets and over-prescriptive accountability affected them adversely. Schools in Challenging Circumstances, they felt, were most heavily burdened with restrictive measures of this kind.

There is something paradoxical – presenting a dilemma for those shaping educational policy – in the testimony of these Heads. It is this: success in schools, in their opinion, tends to come from Heads having the judgement and self-confidence to make up their own minds about which initiatives to follow and which to disregard; the better their schools do, the more latitude they can take. On the other hand, the less successful a school is, the more the hands of the Heads are tied by restrictions and impositions which make it increasingly difficult for them to use their particular skills and knowledge to solve the problems.

The day did not allow time for the Heads to suggest ways to solve this paradox, or to propose solutions to the issues they raised. But they expressed the strong feeling that, such was the convergence of views from successful practitioners from a wide variety of backgrounds, The Prince's Teaching Institute should disseminate the conclusions of the day and that it should hold future seminars to explore solutions to the issues raised. So, in response to the wishes of the Heads participating, this paper summarises the conclusions of the day, re-affirming What Works In Schools and highlighting the things that, in their eyes, are the biggest obstacles to replicating success.



Bernice McCabe
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Background

In January 2008, The Prince's Teaching Institute ran a half-day seminar in collaboration with Business In The Community entitled What Works In Schools, at which twelve Heads from schools in and around London were present. The delegates at the seminar came to the conclusion that the following attributes were essential in running a good school:

- Good leadership
- Creating a culture of achievement
- Having high quality subject teachers
- Providing rich extra-curricular activities

To ensure continued success, they highlighted two areas:

- The need to disseminate best practice
- The need to develop Heads of the future

Those attending the day deemed it very successful, and encouraged The Prince's Teaching Institute to run a larger seminar on a pilot basis, with wider participation by successful Heads from across the country, and the intention to explore whether there is potential for holding similar events in the future.

In follow-up discussions, the Heads expressed the view that it was also important to use such a conference to address some questions fundamental to the future of education, such as:

- What can be learned from the past?
- How can education retain coherence and rigour?
- Are we meeting the challenge for all pupils?
- How can we learn from other schools?
- How can we create more effective partnerships?
- How can current obstacles be overcome?

The Prince's Teaching Institute therefore organised a seminar in December, bringing together successful Heads from across the country to debate these questions:

- What works in schools?
- How can we replicate success?

In seeking areas of consensus in answer to these questions, the day was designed to lead to conclusions that provided insight and practical guidance to others.

The participating Heads reached general agreement on many of the issues raised, and expressed a strong feeling that The Prince's Teaching Institute should hold further Heads' seminars of this kind, and that the conclusions of the day's discussions should be disseminated. This paper is a summary of the proceedings and reproduces the speeches given.

1. Summary of conclusions from round-table discussions

The seminar was divided into two parts, with the day beginning by a series of talks and round-table discussions. These were divided into three sessions:

- Context: What does success look like in education?
- Current practice: What works and what does not work in current practice?
- Teaching and Learning: What can we do to promote better teaching and learning to strengthen “what works”?

For each session, there was a talk which stimulated debate, and each table was asked to report back its main conclusions. Many of the conclusions from the different tables overlapped, and below is a summary of those conclusions. (The talks and the exact table conclusions can be found in Appendices 2-5.)

1.1 Success in Schools

The Heads agreed that successful schools are those with leaders who have the confidence to use their freedom in pursuit of academic and pastoral excellence; and that this usually involves a willingness to innovate and take some risks, with the concomitant benefits of:

- Wider participation for pupils
- Greater focus on the individual child
- Increased opportunities for social mobility

Heads felt that what gets in the way of achieving such success is:

- Overload of new central initiatives without a coherent underpinning philosophy
- Over-emphasis on targets
- Over-prescriptive accountability
- Schools in Challenging Circumstances were seen to be particularly burdened with restrictive measures of this kind

1.2 Good Current Practice in Schools

The Heads agreed that the most important elements of successful school leadership today are:

- Clarity of vision
- Good communication skills
- A positive outlook which makes staff feel valued and encouraged
- The courage to focus on realising the vision and shake off the cold hand of conformity and compliance

They felt that, with the help of these attributes, the Head will be able to:

- Develop an ethos of achievement for all
- Enhance the teaching and learning of a knowledge-based curriculum with effective subject-specialists and mentors as appropriate
- Provide worthwhile extra-curricular enrichment
- Gain the support of the community in, for instance, ensuring good standards of behaviour among pupils

The Heads agreed that Schools gain much by working in collaboration, supporting and learning from each other and affording more opportunities for staff development.

1.3 Good Teaching and Learning

The Heads agreed that the requirements of good teaching and learning are:

- The recruitment of excellent teachers who are excited by their subject

- The development of these teachers through subject-based CPD and Masters programmes
- Raising the standard of literacy among pupils coming on from Primary Schools
- Setting high expectations for all students both within and beyond the curriculum
- A programme of extra-curricular activities that is challenging and subject-related, and provides additional opportunities for success

They also agreed that there are currently obstacles in the way of good teaching and learning, including:

- The stream of new central initiatives
- The increasingly risk-averse culture
- Difficulties in meeting extra costs for cover, extra-curricular activities, resources and training

2. Summary of the main points made in the pupil panel

The afternoon began with a panel of four sixth-formers, two from Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College and two from Gordon's School, with Oliver Blond, Head of The Henrietta Barnett School chairing the discussion. The following is a summary of the points the pupils made.

What makes great teaching and learning?

- Teachers who are prepared to go beyond the specifications and explain the meaning and significance of any lesson.
- Teachers who can channel the natural drive of the individual pupil by providing space and encouragement for them to think laterally and independently.
- Teachers who have the right style and attitude, combining humour, effective management to generate mutual respect, and above all passion for their subject
- Inspiration drawn from other pupils.

Are schools too obsessed with exams and assessment?

- Yes, if that is all that the schools are interested in. There should also be a strong extra-curricular programme to stimulate other facets of development.
- Exams are necessary milestones and are required for qualifications; but other important things like developing leadership skills and learning about oneself are best done in other non-examined contexts.
- Assessment Objectives should give pupils the latitude to manipulate their own creativity.
- Assessment should be able to differentiate ability adequately, not flatter students' schools and centrally-compiled statistics.

What is the best way of trying to engage the less well motivated pupils?

- Convincing them of the point and purpose of the lesson, e.g. by showing how an idea in Science is grounded in the real world.
- Through strong leadership in the classroom, which will show them that they do have potential.
- Finding their strengths and interests; there will be something that they can excel in.
- If the teacher has the right positive attitude, the pupils will adopt it too.

What has made your subject mean more to you than any other?

- (Science). Wider reading, outside the specifications, encouraged by the teacher.
- (Art). Being taken to a class in Somerset House, and given the confidence to feel that each pupil's inspiration and creativity are as valid as anyone else's.
- (Music, Drama). Being encouraged to go on trying different things until you found what really inspired you.
- (History). Learning that History is the statement of opinion and you don't have to agree with what other historians say.

How attractive is teaching as a profession?

- A programme in the school which gets older pupils acting as mentors to those who are younger and perhaps less able can be very satisfying; but the profession does not make enough of this sort of appeal.
- When you have found a way yourself of solving a problem, it is good to be able to share this knowledge with others who might be having the same difficulty.

Do any of your teachers take time to ask you whether their teaching is inspiring or not?

- On the whole they don't, and it would be good if they did. Certain subjects, like Art, lend themselves more naturally to this sort of exchange of ideas, and then it is up to the pupils no less than the teachers to offer and invite feedback.
- If relationships between teacher and pupil can be built outside the classroom, e.g. on the sports field, this helps mutual understanding and can lead more naturally to conversations about the quality of teaching.

If you were able to leave this group of Heads with one message, what would it be?

- Think of your school not as a place of work but as an environment in which enthusiasm and hard work need to be cherished and inspiration cultivated.
- Listen to your pupils and encourage them to express opinions so that they will be readier to say which teaching does and doesn't work.
- The most important thing for a school is to have a body of well-qualified, informed, and passionate staff. Misbehaviour is usually born out of frustration.
- Offer a choice of ways of doing any task; just as there are different ways of teaching, so there are different ways of learning.
- Encourage your teachers to develop their extra-curricular interests and share them with their pupils.

3. Summary of the main points made in the Panel Discussion

The day concluded with a panel and plenary discussion. It was chaired by broadcaster and journalist John Humphrys, and the panellists were Dr John Dunford (Association of School and College Leaders), Sue Horner (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), Steve Munby (National College of School Leadership) and Sir Mike Tomlinson (London Schools).

The discussion centred on five areas:

- Autonomy and accountability
- Education policy-making
- Academic and vocational education
- Assessment
- Competition and collaboration

What follows is a summary of the points raised.

2.1 Autonomy and Accountability

The panellists agreed that Heads are public servants spending public money for which they are quite properly held to account. However, the present system of accountability in schools they felt to be (a) excessive, (b) inappropriate, (c) not 'intelligent'.

a. Excessive, because it is an accretion of little pieces: every new central initiative has to have measurable performance indicators attached to it. As these initiatives come from different sources, no-one in government or its agencies is aware of the overall effect and how much of a burden this all adds up to for the Head and the school to bear.

b. The accountability appears inappropriate when schools are given responsibilities that do not really belong to them. When there is a problem of a particular kind affecting children, central decision-makers tend to impose a national solution with accompanying bureaucracy even when many schools do not have the problem or need the solution. This simply gets in the way of the school's core business of teaching and learning. Schools, however, feel obliged or pressurised into giving maximum attention to meeting measurable targets as required of them, even when it is just a matter of ticking boxes. Really the Heads felt we should be measuring what we value, not valuing what we measure. The new idea of having a single unified form of accountability through a 'balanced scorecard' which takes proper account of what we think schools are all about might be well worth considering, so long as it is a genuine consultation and not a *fait accompli*.

c. Intelligent Accountability is a concept taken from the O'Neill Reith Lectures. Accountability in schools appears to be "not intelligent" if it restricts the creative use of a school's autonomy by requiring it to concentrate narrowly on the attainment of particular targets, like raising the percentage of pupils crossing the C/D boundary at GCSE. Similarly, some of the panellists cite current performance measures on Community Cohesion as an example of targets that are a distraction from much more important aspects of education like extra-curricular activities - which are of far greater concern to parents and pupils.

2.2 Education Policy-Making

The panellists felt that policy-making initiatives in education tend to be driven by perceived problems rather than by a principled view of what education is or should be, or they arise from locally observed instances of good practice, either in this country or overseas, which a policy-maker thinks should be replicated nationwide. This has resulted in an accidental accretion of policies which have no coherence and which may, in some schools or areas, be irrelevant or inappropriate.

The Heads present expressed the view that consultation by Government too often tends to be either for window-dressing (when a decision has effectively already been made), or on things that really are a waste of their time because they have little to do with the core business of running a school or improving it. Heads should certainly engage in the national debate about educational matters; but, so long as there is an effective and appropriate national framework of curriculum and assessment in place, the Heads present felt they should so far as possible be left to identify their own local problems and find their own solutions to them.

2.3 Academic and Vocational Education

In the view of the panel, there has been a shortage of good vocational education opportunities ever since the failure to implement properly that part of the 1944 Education Act - vocational in the sense not of specific job preparation but of equipping pupils with the broad knowledge and skills that underpin technical work.

The panellists felt that the rigorous study of academic subjects that combine theoretical and practical elements is the best preparation for work, in the way that a knowledge of Maths and Physics is needed before embarking on an Engineering course.

They said that it is not a matter of differentiating between knowledge and skills; in education, the two should be considered together, since there has to be a basis of knowledge on which the skills are developed.

2.4 Assessment

The panellists felt that rigorous subject-based teaching is currently bedevilled by inappropriate assessment and by an assessment system that demeans scholarship because over-prescriptive marking schemes punish pupils for knowing too much or thinking for themselves.

The panellists drew attention to the problem that the grading of answers cannot simply be left to the instinct of individual examiners, however experienced; and that, in the interests of fairness, when you have national exams taken by every child in the country and not just by 20% of them (as in the old O Levels), you have to have an agreed scheme. It is, they suggested, a huge and as yet unresolved problem, how to reconcile the interests of the mass of examinees, regardless of background, with those of talented individuals; and on-screen testing would probably make this problem even worse.

The panel expressed the view that it is not a good use of the assessment system to add up the results of every individual child in order to see how the national scheme of education is progressing; a sensible method of sampling would be easier and just as effective.

2.5 Competition and Collaboration

The panellists felt that the publication of results nationally, giving rise to the creation of League Tables, produces an element of competition between schools which may do something to raise standards. However, in their view and in the view of the Heads present, the notion of collaboration between schools to achieve improvement is clearly one whose time has come.

They suggested that getting schools to work with other schools – state schools with independent, successful schools with those doing less well – is already achieving a great deal more in raising standards than any number of new central initiatives could do.

4. Conclusions

In summary, from the table and panel discussions, the things that those taking part in the seminar generally agreed to work well in schools and contribute most to their success are:

- Confident, visionary and principled leadership
- Freedom for Heads to find local solutions to local problems
- The recruitment and development of teachers who are excited by their subject
- A knowledge-based curriculum that provides continuity and challenge
- The provision of subject-related extra-curricular enrichment
- High expectations for all pupils both within and beyond the curriculum
- Collaboration between schools

Conversely, the things that they felt to get in the way of schools working well are:

- The introduction of a stream of centralised policy initiatives which do not seem to be informed by any coherent underpinning
- Systems of accountability that are excessive and not related to the real job of the school
- Systems of assessment that encourage over-emphasis on particular targets and do not sufficiently reward talent and independent thinking

Appendix 1: Selected quotes from the seminar

Pupil Panel

“Assessment should be able to differentiate ability adequately, not flatter students’ schools and government statistics.”

“If a teacher instils that passion that he has into his pupils, anything can be possible.”

“The most important thing for a school is to have a body of well-qualified, informed, and passionate staff.”

Plenary discussion and panel

“There are two problems: the first that there is over-accountability and the second that the accountability we do have is not the right one.”

“Because government is concerned about where the system is failing, they tend to intervene and give national solutions to all schools when actually many schools don’t need those solutions.”

“The accountability system is out of control. It’s out of control because it has become an accretion of little pieces: every initiative has expectations and performance indicators associated with it.”

“I think what schools expect and deserve is an accountability system which is understandable, which is consistent in its application and which relates to the real job of the school. We haven’t got that at the moment.”

“The autonomy I want is the autonomy of decision-making of how you control budgets, how you organise, but there is still a framework as National Curriculum.”

“It is important that we measure what we value, not that we value what we measure.”

[On Education policy-making] “I think that a lot of it at the moment – the initiatives are driven by perceived problems rather than a principled view of what the job is and the best way of enacting it.”

“If we can get the curriculum and the assessment system right, in my personal view, that would be enough for people to operate within.”

“I’ve been a Head for a long time, and we are avoided, we are not consulted properly. The important decisions are made by politicians or civil servants or a mixture, and we are left to be consulted on minor things.”

“I think we have failed in this country over many decades to take seriously the provision of really good vocational education.”

“I hate the concept of knowledge-free skills. You need to have a basis of content on which to develop skills, and it seems to me that we need to bring the knowledge and skills together. You can’t have one without the other.”

“We have got ourselves into an assessment system that demeans scholarship.... we have a system which, for the most able in our country, punishes you for knowing too much.”

“We haven’t yet worked out how we can make it [marking of exams] more sensitive to individuals and also equitable and fair so it isn’t just the good middle class kids who get the top grades.”

“The main problem about assessment is the purposes to which assessments are put, in particular the way we add up the results of every single child in the country to monitor the progress of the national system instead of a sensible sampling system.”

“I’m convinced that the way to improve the system is by collaboration – learning from each other, sharing ideas, and not sticking in your own institution.... And it includes using our best school leaders in those areas where they desperately need good leadership.”

“The whole way of school working with school is the way to improve the system – not policy initiatives. The real school improvers are other schools’ staff and students.”

Appendix 2: Notes from Councillor Geoffrey Samuel's speech: What works in schools is a matter of conviction

- 'What works' depends on what you believe in. For example what 'works' for a school whose aim (actual example) is to 'bring the children closer to Jesus' will be different from a mainstream comprehensive.
- Therefore the starting point must be the aim of the school.
- When schools do not adopt the policies and practices which we like (!) it is usually due not to negligence or incompetence but to conviction. Provision for the gifted is an example.
- Teaching is a 'conviction' profession.
- Where are we in Secondary education ?
- Proponents of comprehensive education won the argument in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Some were (from pre-war days) committed egalitarians, others, dissatisfied with the workings of the tripartite system, simply wanted the abolition of selection
- For the latter group, the mere abolition of selection was their aim. They would then discuss what worked.
- For the former, dedicated rightly (see below) to consistency, abolition of streaming, setting, prefects, competitive sport were all part of the comprehensive ethic.
- Personally I am committed to the approach of Hugh Gaitskell in the 1959 election: comprehensive schools mean a grammar school education for every pupil.
- Not literally (although proponents of the spiral curriculum would say otherwise) but the grammar school ethos, values and beliefs.
- In general consistency works: when every aspect of the school delivers and reinforces the aims: this is particularly true of the hidden curriculum
- Paradigm. Start with the aims/beliefs: from these are derived a priori the strategies: from the strategies the policies: from the policies the practices.
- Test of any eg policy: is it right in itself ? does it contribute to the achievement of the overall aims ?
- The current challenge: to review the working of the comprehensive system and decide how we want it to develop over the next 30-40 years. Review is long overdue. (CTCs, specialist schools. Academies are merely a side show.)
- ONLY then – when we know what the aims of the school are – can we talk about 'what works'

Appendix 3: Speech by Sir Michael Wilshaw: Are we meeting the challenge for all pupils?

In 1968, my first teaching appointment was at St Michael's School in the London Docklands. Back then, the docks were still alive and working, and you can imagine that with the sons and daughters of the dock workers making up the majority of the children, it was a pretty tough place to work.

Now, I'm sure that all of us in the room can think of a pupil who has made our life difficult, and the person who made my life a bit of a misery in this, my first teaching appointment, was a girl by the name of Tracy Elkins.

I still remember vividly one class when I was teaching *The Merchant of Venice*. We had come to the scene at the beginning of Act 4, when Shylock is brought to the court of justice and is standing his ground, demanding his pound of Antonio's flesh. You'll remember that Portia, dressed as a lawyer, tells Shylock that he should show mercy to Antonio in that wonderful speech "The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.." and so on.

Well, I was maybe a few lines into this speech when Tracy's hand went up. "Can't you find a proper job, Sir?"

Although I had fairly murderous thoughts, not for one moment did I think that Tracy Elkins should not have had access to Shakespeare because it was too hard or that *The Merchant of Venice* should be taught through the medium of global trade within the Humanities curriculum area.

I did think, however, that I should have spent more time with Tracy on language, that "the quality of mercy is not strained" is such a beautiful phrase that it could have been explained much better, and that if I had been head of that school I would have done much more on basic skills and literacy to help Tracy at a much earlier stage. I would have flooded the school with books, modernised the pitiful library, ensured that each child carried a reader, and that children who didn't achieve received, at the earliest stage, extension and enrichment programmes in the evening and came in on Saturday mornings for catch-up sessions – local management has allowed us to do all these things.

I would also have ensured that children like Tracy who are quite used to yelling at teachers couldn't do that and that the behaviour structure was so tight that the weakest, most vulnerable teacher could teach without going home a gibbering wreck – we need to ask why is it that one in three of our newly qualified teachers leave teaching in the first four years of the profession – not because they have fallen out of love with their subject, nor increased bureaucracy, not because they don't like children any more or because they have stopped wanting to make a difference to society. It's because too many of our schools don't give our young teachers sufficient support and give too little attention to culture and ethos – creating an orderly environment where all adults, irrespective of their ability to teach, receive the respect they deserve – I'll come back to that in a minute.

Fast forward thirty five years from Tracy Elkins and Docklands to the opening of Mossbourne Academy in Hackney in 2004. Being one of the first Academies we were inundated with people from the Department and elsewhere – they always arrived with clipboards and check-lists. Top of the list was that terrible word - innovation. I remember one guy who pushed that issue harder than most – What are you doing to be different, to be cutting edge, to be in the vanguard of reform, to demonstrate blue sky thinking? – you could see the kind of guy he was.

Well, I said in my usual, subservient way, I'm doing what I can, extending the school day, a long teaching week, enrichment classes etc. That wasn't enough. But what are you doing on the curriculum, he pressed? Nothing, I said. I could see a look of disbelief. You mean you're offering the national curriculum? Yes. But how? You know, the usual – English, Maths, Science, History, Geography – the jaw dropped even further - I could see him itching to write something quite different – Mossbourne is innovating through the introduction of modular, cross-curricular themes warped and wefted through the timetable which is collapsed for two days a week so that the citizenship faculty can meet with the science-for-society faculty on obesity and healthy-eating issues.

After about the third visit from the man with the clipboard and check-list I had had enough. He left by mutual consent and a rejoinder from me that innovation is something much more substantial. That is, getting children in

Hackney who have suffered from years of poor leadership, poor teaching and low expectation levels to achieve well.

The reason I mention Tracy Elkins and the man from the Department is to illustrate two or three points on how I think we are getting it wrong on the curriculum and its impact on standards.

Schools that worry too much about curriculum design and not enough about school culture and teaching and learning, I think, have got the balance wrong. Schools are complex places, urban schools even more so. To overlay them with needlessly complex curriculum structures often creates a tiresome bureaucracy and a proliferation of useless meetings. Line management and accountability for performance becomes diffuse and buck-passing endemic to the system.

Having looked at school with lots of curriculum sub-committees I have often walked away asking the question, "Why does that school constantly want to reinvent the wheel?" (Schemes of work are schemes of work, are schemes of work). However, look at a school which engages its governors and staff continuously on teaching and learning and what makes for a good lesson and you'll probably see a good school. The school that worries more about the curriculum than behaviour in corridors, playgrounds and classrooms – creating a civilised and orderly community – is a school that doesn't have the right priorities. It is no wonder that in the early days of the Academy programme when curriculum innovation took precedence over everything else that so many came unstuck. I am not arguing for curriculum silos. Far from it. Good schools collaborate when they need to and understand that subject areas impinge upon each other. But we need a sense of proportion and not formalise the process to the point of absurdity.

Tracy Elkins' entitlement to Shakespeare to me is an absolute. It is patronising to think otherwise. It may be harder and we may have to struggle against her background, family upbringing and culture, but should we give up or even worse, pretend that we are delivering something valuable when it is mixed up with a curriculum pot pourri or unintelligible strands of learning and curriculum pathways leading to qualifications of dubious status.

I am old enough to remember the days before 1988 and the advent of the national curriculum when there was a virtual free-for-all in the curriculum schools could offer, to the point where some schools and some headteachers could suggest that Maths at Key Stage Four could be an option choice.

We have come a long way since then and the national curriculum, despite everything, is surely recognition that there should be a national consensus on what is taught and learnt - a body of knowledge on which young people can gain the skills necessary to draw conclusions about themselves and the world in which they live. I don't agree with those who would start at the other end. In other words, the function of the curriculum is not necessarily to acquire knowledge to make abstract connections, sift evidence, interrogate authority etc – great if you are a Band A student, or especially if you are a Band A student from a middle class background where knowledge and facts, books and information are ready to hand. Not so good if you are poor, living on an estate and there is none of that.

There are some who are keen to turn every preoccupation from healthy eating to citizenship into a school subject. The corollary of doing this is a not too subtle attempt to manipulate, sociologise, and possibly dumb-down the curriculum.

GCSE History, short modular bursts of crime throughout the ages with no sense of historical context and chronology. Science, a discussion of the morality of nuclear power stations without the necessary in-depth knowledge of nuclear power itself. Geography, global citizenship and environmental awareness over the detailed knowledge of the workings of our planet.

My concern is that the growing abandonment of subject discipline will lead to many of our most disadvantaged children losing out. You may have read the Times Educational Supplement last week which reported that those comprehensive schools which have most enthusiastically abandoned specific subject teaching for a more flexible, porous curriculum have seen their standards drop. My concern is that parents who can afford it can access specific subject teaching earlier rather than later, with the most successful prep schools introducing discrete subjects taught by subject specialists before pupils go on to secondary education.

It is not unreasonable to use the argument that a loosening of the curriculum, where breadth is more important than depth, where skills are seen as a substitute for knowledge, that outcomes will deteriorate. As a nation, we need to worry about the concern over grade-inflation. We need to worry that in the latest PISA studies of advanced economies and their educational performance, we have dropped from fourth to fourteenth place in Science, seventh

to seventeenth place in Literacy, and eighth to twenty fourth in Mathematics. This drop is not just a consequence of other countries improving at a faster rate, the absolute performance of our students also dropped.

In Literacy we scored an average of 529 points in 2000, 507 in 2003 and 495 in 2006. In Science the scores dropped from 532 to 515 over the same period.

In the latest PIRLS study on reading we dropped down the ranking from third in 2001 to fifteenth in 2007.

The reason I rail against all this is the drift to an educational apartheid – where independent schools, grammar schools and perhaps the top comps treat the whole modular, thematic, non-subject based curriculum with disdain, see the accreditations on which this sort of curriculum is based as worthless currency and opt for IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate. I, for one, refuse to throw in the towel at Mossbourne Academy. We will continue to have a subject-based curriculum. We will continue to offer three modern languages to Key Stage Four, with our lowest ability groups studying at least one language at Key Stage Three. We will continue to offer the separate sciences for half of Key Stage Four, and History, Geography and RE will be taught as discrete subjects. We will continue to work on the premise that Shakespeare can be appreciated and loved by all children including the Tracy Elkins of this world.

Appendix 4: Speech by Bernice McCabe: What is the point of subjects?

When we considered the title for today's seminar we knew we were entering contentious territory.....

A recent article in The Financial Times asked the question "What is the purpose of education?" The writer went on to provide, not an answer, but a choice. "Is it: (a) to create adults equipped to compete in a global marketplace, (b) to develop imaginative and well-rounded individuals, or (c) to establish a homogeneous society with equal opportunities for all?"

Most people would argue that what we want is an economically successful and competitive country, imaginative and well-rounded individuals and equal opportunities for all.

Similarly, if you were looking for a response to the question, "What makes a school successful?", you would have to start by determining what constitutes success. Is it large numbers getting high grades in public exams? A high proportion going on to Higher Education? A good take up of extra curricular activities? Low truancy and exclusion rates? Or should we be looking beyond the quantifiable statistics to the moral and social attitudes of the pupils, their capacity to work both in teams and individuals and the effectiveness of their preparation for adult life?

Well, you don't need me to tell you of all people – such a distinguished and respected collection of Heads – that this, too, is not an either/or question. A school with high aspirations for its pupils will be trying to set and maintain standards in all of these areas.

Definitions of the purpose of education have inevitably changed over the centuries as prevailing philosophies have affected not just Art, Music and Literature but also our concepts of schooling.....from the 18th century and its Age of Reason to the Romantic movement and the cult of the individual.

The need in an enlightened democracy to create educated citizens where every talent would be given a chance to excel has been recognised for hundreds of years; in the late industrial era, the economic need for a high level of shared knowledge became more urgent. And during the 20th Century, the "Romantic" theory of child-centred education – where teaching the child is more important than teaching the subject - gained ground, and knowing "how to learn" and being given the "tools" to continue learning became more important than having a broad foundation of knowledge.

Today, the great challenges of a globalised economy, sustainability, and the shifting demographics of our population are prompting a great deal of thought about the educational needs of the new generation. The Royal Society of Arts, for instance, has produced an Education Charter for the 21st Century, which recognises the rights of pupils to achieve their potential, whatever their background and wherever their abilities may lie. In its Big Picture of the Curriculum, the QCA sets out its aims as being the development of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, and Responsible Citizens, and suggests these characteristics are to be developed through the acquisition of the right Attitudes and Attributes, Skills, and Knowledge and Understanding. This list would probably command general consent – though it may be significant that Knowledge is only placed fourth on the list.

The pronouncements of these different bodies may suggest that there is a general consensus about the broad aims of education [and that it needs to serve a multiplicity of purposes]. We all want our pupils to be able to think for themselves; to be confident and responsible; to have a sound sense of values for themselves and a sympathetic respect for others; to be equipped for work and for leisure. And so on. About these things we are likely to agree.

But where the challenge lies is in ordering the priorities and in reconciling the conflicting demands by restoring a clarity of educational purpose for our schools.

When we planned today's seminar, we didn't just give it the title "What is a successful school?", because we judged the answer to be self-evident; a pilot seminar on the topic earlier this year achieved ready consensus from the Heads present: one that achieves those broad aims I have just listed; the questions we were left with were "Why isn't it easier to replicate success in all our schools?" and "What actually works?" "What should you attach the

greatest importance to?" "What are the key strategies?" And we hope by the end of today this seminar will have offered some answers to questions like these.

The point that I want to develop over the next few minutes is the importance of knowledge: the proposition that the prime function [the first priority for] of a school is the acquiring and passing on of knowledge; and that the proper context for gaining that knowledge is [not "Overarching Themes", but] subject disciplines.

I am aware that in 2008, this is not a fashionable view.

For evidence, look at how syllabus requirements have been reduced in all the mainstream subjects: how many topics have been dropped from school mathematics and Chemistry, how many fewer texts –and fewer still whole texts – have to be studied in English and Foreign Languages. Ask any University Admissions Officer. Look at the increasing number of remedial courses which Universities are having to provide in order to bring their new students' level of knowledge up to that required for embarking on an Honours Degree.

The problem is compounded when specialist teachers are hard to find. Everyone here will be familiar with the problem of finding physicists or linguists. According to official figures published last year, fewer than two thirds of Physics teachers in our secondary schools have a degree in the subject. But that is by no means the worst case. Half of secondary English teachers did not study the subject at University, and one in five has no post-A Level qualification in it. It is even worse in mathematics, for which the figures are 58% with no Maths degree and 24% with no qualification beyond A Level.

It would be cynical to suggest that subject knowledge was not the highest priority in government thinking about the curriculum because teachers are not there to deliver it. But, for whatever reason, there is a tendency to relegate Knowledge to the category of Statutory Expectations, along with Communication, Personal Development, Problem-Solving and the like. And the RSA Charter that I referred to earlier, though it proposes that "the curriculum...should balance abstract and practical knowledge", pronounces that "Young people should leave formal education with confidence, aptitude and skills they need for life and work." You will note the significant silence about what, if anything, they should know.

Interestingly, Professor Tim Brighouse, writing in this Autumn's edition of the RSA Journal about the challenge of "eliminating failure" in the context of the same Charter, seems to spot the omission. He offers arguments "for trying to minimise failure and optimise individual success". These arguments are not only moral, social, and economic, but also cultural. He writes: "We owe it to our future citizens to ensure that they are initiated into the essential culture of a society and are capable of shaping its development."

Here we are entering the ground on which the Prince's Teaching Institute stands. The impetus for the creation of the Institute was provided by the Prince of Wales's wish to support teachers in their love of subject – English and History at the outset – which had brought them into teaching in the first place. Our approach has been based on the premise that pupils are most likely to be inspired by, and hence learn most from, teachers who are passionate about their subject, from teachers who are given the opportunity and encouragement to foster this passion in their professional development.

The experience of eight Summer Schools and numerous individual training days, and our involvement with the 1250 teachers who have attended them have provided a ringing endorsement of the Institute's aims and principles. The teachers feel empowered by the knowledge that their subjects are important in a wider context because of what they tell us about ourselves and the world we live in; they acknowledge the need for challenge and academic rigour in order to bring out the best in their pupils; and they respond with unqualified enthusiasm to the subject-based professional development that the Institute provides and which is so hard to find from other sources.

It is not only the teachers who are so keen on subject knowledge. Research among pupils carried out by the Training and Development Agency a year ago revealed the same attitude. In response to the question "What is the most important quality needed by a teacher for them to be effective?", nearly half put at the top of their list "having an excellent knowledge of the subject they are teaching." No other attribute came anywhere near in their estimation. This was borne out when we had a panel of Sixth Formers from large Comprehensive Schools speaking at the Summer School we held earlier this year. One of them said, "subject teaching allows you to expand on any ideas you might have; teaching by themes is quite limiting and doesn't allow for a creative thought pattern in the way any subject-based teaching would."

This was an interesting observation. There are some who would place “Overarching Themes” above subjects in the hierarchy of learning, on the grounds of their “significance for individuals and society” and the “relevant learning contexts” they provide. I am sure this is the wrong way round, and not just because of the reasons given by the Sixth Former, to do with imagination and creativity. Dr Kate Pretty, Principal of Homerton College, Cambridge, and a trustee of the teaching Institute, spoke in the most emphatic terms at last year’s Summer School about the problems of trying to study general topics like Global Warming without sufficient underpinning of subject knowledge. “Failure to achieve this informed synthesis,” she said, “leads to superficiality and mediocrity. It’s because we are being asked to run before we can toddle.”

I also believe that our brains naturally put concepts into categories like subjects. Dr Helen Cooper of the Cambridge University English Faculty told a story at recent Teaching Institute event, which illustrates the idea perfectly. It comes from a colleague’s account of the effect of her husband’s stroke. She came home in the evening and found the cutlery from the dishwasher, which he would normally have put away, scattered all over the kitchen, because he had lost the capacity to associate a knife with the category “knives” and so with the appropriate compartment of the cutlery drawer (or, if you will, the appropriate compartment of the brain). This seemed a forceful demonstration that our brains are hard-wired to work in terms of categories, or disciplines, or genres, or whatever may be the appropriate division for what you are studying: not in terms of themes that “overarch” them.

So, I am arguing that subjects should have priority. They are interesting in their own right as well as providing the bank of knowledge required for significant, non-superficial, exploration of important interdisciplinary topics like sustainable development and the applications of technology. They are what excite teachers. As one of them said to us at the end of the last Summer School, “Love of subject [and the desire to pass it on to the next generation] is the driving force that keeps teachers in the profession.” Can you see today’s younger generation being inspired to become teachers as a result of studying “Healthy Lifestyles, Community participation and Critical Thinking” Where is the passion in that?

We set the title for this seminar “What works in Schools”; and my answer is clear. It is an institution that has a clarity of purpose about the quality of teaching in the classroom; teachers with a passion for their subject and a love of subject knowledge, and a desire to communicate these things to their pupils. From these priorities, all else flows. Where children are inspired – and I have experienced this in classrooms from inner city comprehensive schools to selective provincial grammars – they will succeed.

And that this is not an outdated, idiosyncratic or elitist belief, is shown by the overwhelming support we have had from the teachers themselves from maintained schools across the country who have worked with the Prince’s Teaching Institute. The Institute actively promotes the principle that subject knowledge, subject rigour, and enthusiasm for communicating them are essential requirements for effective teaching. The response of the teachers to our courses could not be more positive. In countless evaluations they have spoken in the warmest possible terms of how they have been stimulated, reinvigorated, inspired, re-engaged in rediscovering the joy of learning, and of having their faith and confidence renewed.

All this testimony must mean something. It surely indicates where the heart beats in our schools. And no amount of official pronouncements about “whole curriculum dimensions” and “personalised learning” will persuade me otherwise.

Appendix 5: Statements by table

Session 1: Context: What does success look like in education?

- Table 1: “On the positive side there is greater autonomy for Heads and wider participation for pupils. On the negative side policy overload and the assessment + accountability regime are limiting for schools. We need to focus on more collaboration.”
- Table 2: “The system exhibits a greater professionalism and child focus. But schools face a challenging social environment with a danger of over-emphasis on targets and not enough encouragement for risk-taking and extra-curricular enrichment.”
- Table 3: “The time is right to re-engage with establishing a positive world-class education system in this country. This will be achieved by coherent and positive engagement in policy-making, not tinkering with the philosophy. Otherwise, educational isolation will increase.”
- Table 4: “We should talk about schools with confident leaders free to pursue academic and pastoral excellence without excessive political interference so that children are liberated to enjoy social mobility.”
- Table 5: “Successful schools have freedom and take it. Schools in Challenging Circumstances don’t and can’t.”

Session 2: Current practice: What works and what does not work in current practice?

- Table 1: “Teaching and Learning is the most important action. Collaboration is the way forward. Leadership is needed to replicate success”
- Table 2: “The school culture should be about an ethos of achievement for all, with highly effective subject specialists and mentors where appropriate. It must focus on literacy if all pupils are to benefit from a curriculum and extra-curricular enrichment which is of worth and provides all of these children with a chance to succeed in a competitive world.”
- Table 3: “The culture for teaching and learning is established and led clearly by the Head. Good teaching is exciting and is supported by a community in which behaviour counts. The Head’s role is having the confidence to stick to their core values and shake off the cold hand of conformity and compliance.”
- Table 4: “Schools should feel more confident in taking risks to provide continuity and challenge in a knowledge-based curriculum more suited to a child’s developmental stage (not age) – even if it reduces their CVA score.”
- Table 5: “Key elements of successful current practice in schools are:
- Clarity of vision
 - Great communication skills
 - A positive and encouraging outlook, recognition of the importance and value of the staff
 - Leadership can be promoted more effectively through schools working together and planning their people development/succession planning in clusters”

Session 3: Teaching and Learning: What can we do to promote better teaching and learning, to strengthen “what works”?

- Table 1: “Well-trained teachers are motivated by their subjects. Subject-based CPD as well as practical experience and Masters are essential.”
- Table 2: “The most pressing current issue is one of the literacy of students arriving from primary school, without which effective learning cannot happen. We must also consider ways of getting a critical mass of excellent young people becoming involved in teaching.”
- Table 3: “Should we set high academic expectations? YES. There should be high expectations for all students both within and above the curriculum.”
- Table 4: “Key obstacles to successful teaching and learning are successive government initiatives and legislation and a culture of low aspirations in some city and suburban societies. The 1265 hours of directed time for teachers can be a barrier.”
- Table 5: “Status of teaching is still not high enough. Successful schools provide what parents want – they should be a safe place where their children can achieve. Good leadership is required, both in schools and in government”

Appendix 6: Attendees

Elizabeth Allen	Head Teacher	Newstead Wood School for Girls
Jill Berry	Headmistress	Dame Alice Harpur School
Oliver Blond	Head Teacher	The Henrietta Barnett School
David Carter	Executive Principal	John Cabot Academy
Ian Carter	Headmaster	Poole Grammar School
Nick Christou	Headteacher	East Barnet School
Dame Julia Cleverdon DCVO, CBE	Special Adviser	The Prince's Charities
Sheila Cooper	Executive Director	Girls' School Association
Barry Day	Headteacher	Greenwood Dale School
Simon Decker	Headteacher	Rainham Mark Grammar School
Dr John Dunford	Chief Executive	Association of School and College Leaders
Marsha Elms	Head	Kendrick Girls' Grammar School
Mike Foley	Headteacher	Great Cornard Upper School
Liz Francis	Director of Teachers' Directorate	TDA
Edwina Gleeson	Headteacher	Newport High School
Paul Grant	Headteacher	Robert Clack School
Caroline Haynes	Principal	Tendring Technology College
Sue Horner	Head of Standards and Assessment Policy	QCA
Alan Kelsey	Trustee	The Prince's Teaching Institute
John King OBE	Headmaster	Gable Hall School
Andrew Linnell	Head Teacher	Desborough School
Gillian Low	Head Mistress	The Lady Eleanor Holles School
Rod Mackinnon	Headmaster	Bristol Grammar School
Catherine McCormack	Headteacher	South Wirral High School
Bernice McCabe	Co-Director	The Prince's Teaching Institute
Denis Mulkerrin CBE	Headmistress	North London Collegiate School
Steve Munby	Headmaster	Gordon's School
Erica Pienaar	Chief Executive	National College for School Leadership
Chris Pope	Executive Head Teacher	Prendergast School
Geoffrey Rees CBE	Co-Director	The Prince's Teaching Institute
Martin Roberts	Principal	Ivybridge Community College
Dana Ross-Wawrzynski	Former Headmaster	The Cherwell School
James Sabben-Clare	Academic Consultant	The Prince's Teaching Institute
Councillor Geoffrey Samuel	Headteacher	Altrincham Grammar School for Girls
Geraldine Scanlan	Former Headmaster	Winchester College
Anne Shinwell	Academic Consultant	The Prince's Teaching Institute
Dr Liz Sidwell	Councillor	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Joan Sjovoll	Head Teacher	St Ursula's Convent School
Delia Smith OBE	Headteacher	Parkstone Grammar School
Paul Strong	Chief Executive	Haberdashers' Aske's Federation
Sir Mike Tomlinson CBE	Head	Framwellgate School Durham
David Triggs	Head	St Angela's Ursuline School
Neil Watts	Head	William Farr Comprehensive School
John Welsh	Headteacher	London Schools
David Wheeldon	Chief Adviser	Greensward College
Clarissa Williams	Principal	Northgate High School
Sir Michael Wilshaw	Headteacher	Bexley Grammar School
Lord Wilson of Dinton	Headmaster	King Edward VI Five Ways School
	Headmaster	National Association of Head Teachers
	National President	Mossbourne Community Academy
	Principal	The Prince's Teaching Institute
	Chairman	

About The Prince's Teaching Institute

The Prince's Teaching Institute believes that all pupils are entitled to a core subject-based curriculum, taught with rigour and inspiration.

The Prince's Teaching Institute is a charity created in 2006, that has grown out of The Prince of Wales Education Summer Schools. Each year since 2002 they have provided an opportunity for teachers to come together to debate and, where necessary, to challenge approaches to the teaching of their subjects.

The philosophy of The Prince's Teaching Institute is rooted in its commitment to improving children's education in state schools by pursuing the following aims:

- Promote and provide subject-based professional development for teachers
- Create an inspirational forum for teachers, enabling them to step away from the classroom and rediscover their love of subject
- Promote the idea that subject knowledge, subject rigour and the enthusiasm for communicating them are essential requirements for effective teaching
- Encourage and inspire teachers, by demonstrating good use of academic rigour and challenge in the classroom
- Create stronger links between academic departments in schools and universities
- Promote and enable a more constructive dialogue between teachers and government agencies
- Exercise a beneficial influence on the development of policy in the areas of curriculum development, assessment and training

The Institute brings together teachers and leading academics with a view to encouraging rigorous and challenging subject teaching in all schools for children of all abilities. It demonstrates how children can be inspired, and consequently achieve higher standards, by teaching that goes beyond the constraints of exam syllabuses and by rich subject provision that incorporates extra-curricular activities. It also provides an additional pathway of communication between teachers and Higher Education and Government Agencies. Teachers of English, History, Science and Geography have been involved to date. Next year the Institute will also include a programme for Mathematics teachers.



The PTI is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital, registered in England & Wales (05910443) and a registered charity (1116224). The registered office is at Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY