

# Parents Teachers

FOR EXCELLENCE

## Warm, Rich, High, Wide: PTE's Philosophy *for Giving Britain's Children an Outstanding Education*



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*Warm/Strict* - *Knowledge Rich* - *High Ambition* - *Wide Curriculum*

# The Parents & Teachers for Excellence Philosophy: Four Mantras

We want educational excellence for every child and believe that this is achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras:

- **Warm/Strict**
- **Knowledge Rich**
- **High Ambition**
- **Wide Curriculum**



Parents and Teachers for Excellence (PTE) is a movement to promote reforms within the education system and to spread good practice to help deliver excellence in schools across the country.

Supported by and drawing from some of the most respected people working in education, we believe in autonomy for schools, a knowledge-based curriculum, rigorous assessment, cultural enrichment and effective behaviour policies. These are already characteristics of many of the top performing schools in the country.

Our website is a rich resource of content designed to help teachers – and parents – to ensure students receive the best education possible.

Please visit [www.parentsandteachers.org.uk](http://www.parentsandteachers.org.uk) for more information.

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## Contents

Introduction – Jon Moynihan OBE	2
The PTE Philosophy – Overview	6
The PTE Philosophy – Warm/Strict	9
The PTE Philosophy – Knowledge Rich	15
The PTE Philosophy – High Ambition	25
The PTE Philosophy – Wide Curriculum	31



# Introduction

All over the world, concern is being expressed about inequality between citizens; in this country, just as in any other. In the UK, if the Government's priority of 'levelling up' is not realised, social mobility will remain low and citizen frustration will remain high, with potentially devastating damage to society in coming years. beyond dire.



To succeed with the levelling-up priority, nowhere is action more needed than in education. Perhaps the most dispiriting feature of the failure to tackle social inequality in the past few decades up to 2010 was the shocking lack of specific action by successive governments towards the problem of hundreds of thousands of children leaving school each year illiterate and innumerate – for example leaving school without a C (Grade 4) in GCSE Maths and English. Those children, now adults, were failed by the UK's education system. With the improved uptake of phonics in schools over the last decade, literacy has certainly improved, but results overall are still beyond dire.

Changing the pass hurdle, or scrapping GCSEs, will not alter the reality: the OECD's hard-to-fiddle international PISA data shows that the UK has a longer tail of educational underperformance at the age of 15 than the large majority of other prosperous countries. Our children know less than their grandparents did. As they proceed into adulthood, those who our education system has failed will lack the skills they need to navigate their way successfully through life. They won't be able to accomplish such basic tasks as filling in a form properly or managing a bank account. Many will struggle all their lives to get any kind of real job, as unskilled manual positions become increasingly scarce. And their lives will be unenriched by the understanding of our society and our (and the world's) history that a full, knowledge-rich education would have imparted to them.

There is no reason why this sorry situation has to continue.



Many non-selective state schools, when they adopt a more rigorous approach to education, whether in poor or rich parts of the country, see 90 per cent or more of pupils passing that GCSE hurdle – and these successful schools know they could do even better. Yet for half a century, large cohorts of children have failed that GCSE hurdle, their education having been sacrificed to doctrinaire, nonsensical, evidence-free theories peddled by “progressive” educationalists.

Well-meaning as they were, such educators have argued that, for example, it is better to sit pupils around a table to “facilitate discussion”, rather than having them facing the front of the classroom. They have polemicised against filling children’s brains with knowledge, for fear this could harm their “natural creativity”. They have sought to abolish or dumb down exams. They have seen needed and natural discipline as impossible – or even wrong.

Then came Michael Gove’s revolutionary stint as education secretary. The reforms he made were attacked despite clear and growing year-by-year evidence of their positive impact on children’s learning.

Bit by bit, and over the past three years especially, the number of children leaving school without proper attainment in Maths and English has slowly dropped, so that many more English children are now leaving their schools more numerate and literate than would have been the case had the failure rates of a decade ago persisted. (But this is only in those schools that have embraced the Gove reforms. Conversely, in many schools, the reforms were resisted, and “progressive” nostrums were even more eagerly pursued. In such schools, the trend has unfortunately been in the opposite direction.) It is hard to overstate the benefit the improved results will have on the life chances of the pupils who have gained; it is tragic for those children living in areas/schools where results have not improved or have even regressed.

The positive outcomes could even be considered a feminist success: improvements in teaching and classroom control appear to have resulted in almost twice as many girls being saved from a poor education (64,000) as boys (38,000), from (between) 2010 to 2017.

But that still leaves the boys – especially working-class boys and even most especially white, working-class boys – high and dry. Indeed, whether boy or girl, even 100,000-plus children saved is only a small part of the problem. Over that same eight-year period, some 1.7 million children left school without basic Maths and English qualifications and with their life chances resultantly blighted. How can this be acceptable? Why is there not more outrage about the way our nation, and particularly our educational establishment, has failed these young citizens?

The success of Gove's innovations, such as the Free Schools programme, and his turbo-boosting of Blair's Academy programme, suggest that very few children need to be leaving school in such a dire position. The medicine is simple: an approach that is both Warm and Strict (love the children, and make sure they know you do, but allow no excuses for poor behaviour); Knowledge Rich (the more children know, the more and more easily they can learn); with a relentlessly High Ambition for each child; and a Wide Curriculum (going way beyond the academic subjects).

Nick Gibb, the excellent former schools minister for almost a decade, articulated and implemented in detail the needed reforms, based on this approach. The international league tables attest to the success of changes, such as insisting on phonics to teach reading, an approach which has proved critical in boosting the literacy of English primary school children. The approach doesn't just help the least well-off or poorly educated; it helps all children raise their game. Spreading it throughout our country, in every school, will lower inequality and propel social mobility.

Yet here we are in 2022 with a number of serious pressure groups – maybe four or five – urging the government to alter the educational and assessment system in ways which, if adopted, take us all the way back to the low achievement levels that existed before any of these reforms started.

There are many different ways to go about teaching a child, and there will always be debate about what is the exact right way. It should however be possible to acknowledge the evidence of which approaches do well, and which don't, so that our educational system can deliver better outcomes for

our children. Yet ideas that were seen as fully discredited 50 years ago come back over and over again, in some new guise, to be tried out yet again, with the same lamentable results, on a hapless new cohort of children. These “progressive” (in truth, regressive) approaches must be firmly resisted and, if possible, eliminated once and for all.

It really is clear that some approaches to teaching work, and some do not. Taking an evidence-based approach, the framework of how to produce a well-educated child is now clear and has been comprehensively outlined in the works of E.D. Hirsch, Daniel T. Willingham, Daisy Christodoulou, and many others. It is that framework that PTE seeks to champion: in this booklet, we seek to outline the governing principles on which it is founded.

To that extent, we see this document as a manifesto for great teaching: for giving children of all types, from all backgrounds, from all parts of the country, a great education that will help them emerge into the world as competent, rounded, fulfilled young citizens.

As a nation, we cannot achieve the desired long-term transformation in the British economy, in science, technology, and overall prosperity, without first discharging our duty to our children to equip them to take part in that task – not to mention giving them an overall richer, more fulfilled life.

We at PTE hope that parents and teachers everywhere will find this short booklet useful, both to inspire and to remind them what they can achieve – in many cases already are achieving – with the children in their care.

**Jon Moynihan OBE**

Chairman

Parents & Teachers for Excellence

September 2022

# The PTE Philosophy

## Overview

**W**e believe that children are capable of extraordinary feats of learning – they just need the right environment in which to flourish. Schools can enable, or frustrate, this, and parents and teachers are key players in determining which it will be.

We want educational excellence for every child, and believe that this is achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras:

- **Warm/Strict**
- **Knowledge Rich**
- **High Ambition**
- **Wide Curriculum**

When schools are built on these four foundations, every child can thrive, no matter their background or starting point. This document sets out the detail of what that means and why it's the right approach:

**Warm/Strict:** Love all the children, while giving them clear structures to thrive within. This enables pupils to be the best version of themselves all day, every day. They know how much people care about them, and how the school's rules will help them to succeed. Pupils know where they stand and how to do well – and the school supports them to achieve this, especially whenever they are finding it hard.

**Knowledge Rich:** This approach to learning ensures that every child is exposed to the best that has been thought, said, and done, building a foundation to understand the world they live in and deal with increasingly complex situations and ideas. This approach is also how a child's innate creativity is unleashed. Rich knowledge is imparted via a carefully sequenced curriculum that allows interconnections to build up, providing every child with access to their birth-right: to be equipped with the life-long skills that



enable them to engage and interact successfully with the world around them. Expert teachers work within plans for subject-specific lessons, to deliver concepts in ways that the children can understand, build on and remember. In this way, each child's knowledge and creativity grows over time.



**High Ambition:** Teachers recognise, and capitalise on, all the potential inherent in every child, preparing pupils for their best possible lives – expecting the best both from them and for them, giving them the ambition to aim for the highest prizes, supporting them to achieve their hopes and dreams. Schools embracing this approach design their entire environment to help young people do their best, whether it's the lessons planned, the assemblies held, how pupils are encouraged to behave, or the exams they sit. Above all, they instill in each child an internalised high ambition, avoiding what has been called, in a phrase originally coined in the 1970s by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “the soft bigotry of low expectations”.

**Wide Curriculum:** Literature, maths, science, humanities, languages, the arts, technology and more – these are the things that make us human and that we want every child to understand and enjoy. A wide curriculum goes

even beyond that list, embracing all those other really important parts of education that enhance school, on into adult life: sport, work experience, musical education, drama, chess, clubs and electives, guest speakers, competitions, assemblies, culture, concerts, trips... enriching experiences for everyone, not just privileged pupils in a minority of schools.

Examples abound of state schools that are able to fit these activities into the school day and the school budget. Pressures of time or money need not prevent a school from offering a Wide Curriculum.

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These four mantras are what PTE stands for and are what we seek to help parents and teachers develop in their schools. There are already many shining examples of schools practicing these mantras across the country. The key, we believe, is for each school to decide how they can espouse these mantras in their own way, and thus achieve great results.

In the following chapters, we discuss in greater detail how each of the four mantras can be achieved.



# Warm/Strict

## How to help every child be their best

**P**TE, and the educational movement it seeks to support, wishes educational excellence for every child. We believe that this will be achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras: Warm/Strict; Knowledge Rich; High Ambition; Wide Curriculum.

So, in detail, what do we mean by... **“Warm/Strict”?**

We say ‘Warm/Strict’ to encapsulate what all at PTE, and those many teachers and heads who think the same way, see as the best approach to how children should be treated in the classroom. Although there is a seemingly dissonant contrast between the two words, in reality they complement each other; neither works without the other.

First, the way the child is treated must be ‘Warm’ because children cannot flourish if they are not loved and truly cared for. Children are at their best only when they feel secure and protected and can trust every action a teacher takes in front of, or for, the child. Teachers must therefore always radiate compassionate concern, and a clear message that they care.

Second, however, children need ‘Strict’ boundaries to be set, or their behaviour will not conform to what is needed for knowledge to be imparted and absorbed. Recent shocking stories of physical abuse of teachers at schools, even primary schools, only go to show further the crucial importance of allowing teachers to impose discipline and get children into the habit of behaving properly. Once good behaviour becomes the norm, transgressions become rare. Adopting a proper approach to discipline ensures that children quickly become aware of, and stay within, the boundaries that keep teachers safe. These boundaries also allow all the children in the class to enjoy fully their right to a good, safe, non-disrupted learning environment. The clearer the boundaries, the easier it is for all pupils to relax within them and settle down to the process of getting a good education.



The ‘Strict’ that comes in here is a function of a belief among educators that the simplest way to achieve a comfortably structured environment is through a “No Excuses” set of policies. These policies lay out rules for how students must behave in that school, and what happens if they don’t; after which the school has to follow through rigorously, always sticking to those rules and structures.



‘Warm’ and ‘Strict’ then become two sides of the same coin, where clear rules and structures for children work. This succeeds best when the children know the rules have been imposed not out of dislike for, or fear of, the child, but out of care and concern. Schools that achieve such a structure are happy places.

As the legendary teacher-trainer Doug Lemov says in *Teach Like a Champion*:

*“You should be caring, funny, warm, concerned, and nurturing – but also strict, by the book, relentless, and sometimes inflexible.”*

Warm/Strict means that you would say to a pupil *“because I care about you, you must serve the consequence for being late”* or *“as I want you to master this topic, you’re going to stay back and redo your homework.”* “No

excuses” means that there is never any need to argue with the child about ‘why’ something has happened or whether a sanction is deserved or not. When an infraction happens, for whatever reason, sanctions are automatic and aren’t argued over.

To have the bedrock to let all teachers act in the Warm/Strict way, every teacher must know that they are fully backed up by the Head and the senior management team. In turn, that means that the Head must lead the implementation of Warm/Strict in the school, articulating what it means and why it’s important, and how it will in detail be rolled out and kept to. (The rules will of course vary somewhat from school to school; the key is that the approach and the specific rules for any particular school are consistent and clearly articulated.)

It’s more, though, than simply explaining to students why the teachers are doing what they’re doing. Warm/Strict schools distinguish between behaviour and people (*“that action was unacceptable”*, not *“you are out of order”*), showing that consequences are temporary, after which the behaviour is forgiven. Teachers will also accompany each stricture with reinforcing, warm, nonverbal behaviour.

Great Warm/Strict schools ensure there are clear structures for pupils and staff to thrive within. Rules and routines are made explicit, so everyone understands what the rules are – for example, for uniforms or detentions – and why they exist: to enable pupils to be the best version of themselves all day, every day. Schools that do well at this sweat the small stuff (that is, enforce the rule and each and every infraction, regardless of the severity or inconvenience) on each and every rule, because they know it matters. This means that pupils always know where they stand and how to succeed and do well at the school and beyond. The school always supports them to succeed – in particular those children who are finding it hard.

A sign that Warm/Strict principles have been successfully embedded is when any pupil in the school can explain to an outsider how things work in practice at the school.



Another sign is when policies and techniques have been systematised such that they are successfully and consistently used across the whole school and are easily and explicitly picked up by new staff, or even by other schools.

Perhaps most importantly, all of this is based on the belief that everyone – pupils and staff – can always do better, and that it's the job of those in charge to ensure this.



Leaders at Warm/Strict schools don't talk or think about 'good' or 'bad' teachers. They don't think that a teacher's performance is primarily down to 'character', or that it's for the individual teacher to win the class by building relationships with kids or ensuring good behaviour through their own set of rules. Rather, they see it as a matter of a school-wide shared teacher mindset, which comes about through training with the right tools.

It is the Leadership's responsibility to provide these tools, in order to ensure the whole teaching team support the Warm/Strict approach, and win with it.

At Warm/Strict schools, the same attitude must also be used when interacting with pupils. Both Leaders and Teachers must believe that given the right

circumstances – rules, rewards, curriculum, support – every child can achieve incredible things, and must be encouraged in every way. Poverty, SENs or other challenges aren't barriers that block success, but hurdles to be overcome with Warm/Strict help. The ultimate goal is for pupils to become more independent and resilient over time, so that they leave the school with the potential to become great, productive citizens.

Getting Warm/Strict right is the very first step toward becoming a great school, which is why so many, including us at PTE, believe so much in its importance.

## Questions for parents to ask a prospective school about Warm/Strict:

- Has the school heard the phrase “Warm/Strict”? What does it think of it? What does the phrase imply to the school?
- Is the approach taken on disciplinary policies a ‘No Excuses’ one? (*If not, why not?*)
- What are the policies on phones? (*They should be banned from class and preferably the school, with strict confiscation policies.*)
- What are the policies on school uniform/dress? (*They should be well defined and unambiguous.*)
- What are the policies on detentions?
- What are the policies on exclusions? What does a school do when a child is disrupting an entire class’s ability to learn its lessons?
- Can you ask any child at the school to explain various policies (say, on phones, on homework, on detentions) and get a uniform, comprehensible, logical explanation?

# Knowledge Rich

## Laying a solid foundation

**P**TE, and the educational movement it seeks to support, wishes educational excellence for every child. We believe that this will be achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras: Warm/Strict; Knowledge Rich; High Ambition; Wide Curriculum.

So, in detail, what do we mean by... ***“Knowledge Rich”***?

How do we best help children develop into smart, creative adults, able to lead fulfilling, happy lives and playing a full part in, and shaping, society? There is a schism in educational circles between people – often influenced by some shamanic-style ideologue – who believe the best way to accomplish this is with only generalised supervision of student-led learning, and people who advocate a careful, structured approach to teaching, building blocks of knowledge – facts, ideas, techniques – which are taught in a planned and sequenced manner.

As many educational commentators have pointed out, analysis has over and over again showed the Knowledge Rich approach to be superior in transforming a child into an informed, engaged adult. However, however often this has become the generally accepted view, time passes and memory fades. Another piper then appears with a new ‘learning for learning’s sake’ approach. This then leads, for a time – in country after country – to a disastrous worsening both of the way children are taught and – inevitably – of citizens’ resultant skills, levels of levels of understanding, and life chances.

Currently, many who are offering nostrums for change in our educational system – which they dub with attractive-sounding captions like ‘C21st Skills’ – talk about teaching creativity, teamwork or critical thinking. But these skills cannot be taught in isolation as a concept to be studied. Rather, they are learnt as a natural outcome of a Knowledge Rich approach. You learn the skill of critical thinking by studying a variety of subjects. To think critically on any subject (say history or maths) you need a large foundation of knowledge

on that subject and others, which builds steadily and meaningfully over time. You learn the skill of teamwork by playing sport, or as a member of an orchestra. And so with any other skill; learning it always requires a foundation of knowledge that can be built on.

An even worse approach pushed by such advocates is 'independent learning' – asking the pupil to find out things for themselves, often via potentially dubious internet sources. Apart from the sheer unreliability of much of what is found on Google, leaving the child to search randomly, on the internet or elsewhere, is far too slow and erratic an approach; the child ends up knowledge-impooverished. To acquire a good store of knowledge on a subject requires a good teacher, instructing children in a carefully sequenced manner, from the front of the class. To embed the knowledge, this instruction has then to be followed by questions and quizzes which reinforce and ingrain the rich knowledge that has been imparted.

In the Knowledge Rich approach, curriculum leaders carefully and deliberately plan the focus and sequencing of the baseline information that their pupils need to absorb and remember. This allows the child to learn, in a sensible sequence, the increasingly more complex aspects of any topic. A series of building blocks creates the solid foundation on which can be constructed layers of more detailed, complex and specific information. Key links and connections can then be easily understood, ensuring a secure grasp of complex subject matter.

The Knowledge Rich movement has demonstrated repeatedly that a lack of such a foundation fatally compromises a child's ability to go on to learn more complex and advanced ideas, techniques and topics. As former headteacher Clare Sealy writes:

*“The curriculum is the means by which we ensure that all our children get their fair share of the rich cultural inheritance our world affords. A good curriculum empowers children with the knowledge they are entitled to: knowledge that will nourish both them and the society of which they are members.”*



Indeed, a full understanding of the store of knowledge and culture of our country must absolutely be seen as the birthright of every British child – whatever their background, origin or ethnicity.

Of course, any and every school curriculum contains knowledge, but in the past fifty years in England, many in education asserted that what specific knowledge was imparted didn't really matter, so long as it focused on what was "relevant" to pupils, and supported development of generic non-topic-based skills. This approach asserted that the 'process of learning' was more important than what was actually learned.

The direct result has been that in England (just as in many other countries, and other regions of the UK), generations of pupils were left with a random and arbitrary understanding of the world they grew up in. As this approach to teaching took hold, their view of our world was increasingly disconnected from the past, the wider present, and the likely future. Children were, consequently, often taught (to the degree that teaching took place) in ways that made it harder for them to learn anything at all.

E.D. Hirsch showed in *Why Knowledge Matters* that the superiority of a Knowledge Rich approach wasn't just something asserted anecdotally by pupils and their teachers; it was immediately apparent in lowered standardised PISA scores<sup>1</sup> wherever the anti-knowledge approach was adopted.

The most prominent recent example is Finland, whose PISA results were for decades the highest in the OECD, helped in particular by the very high calibre (and high pay) of its teachers. In 2016, however, Finland introduced a new approach, "phenomenon-based learning strategies", based on encouraging "students to become more active in their studies, to cooperate in study and research groups".

The result has been to see Finland plummet down the PISA tables, particularly for poor, or disadvantaged, or immigrant, or indeed male pupils. Paradoxically – and depressingly – when visitors flock to Finland to discover

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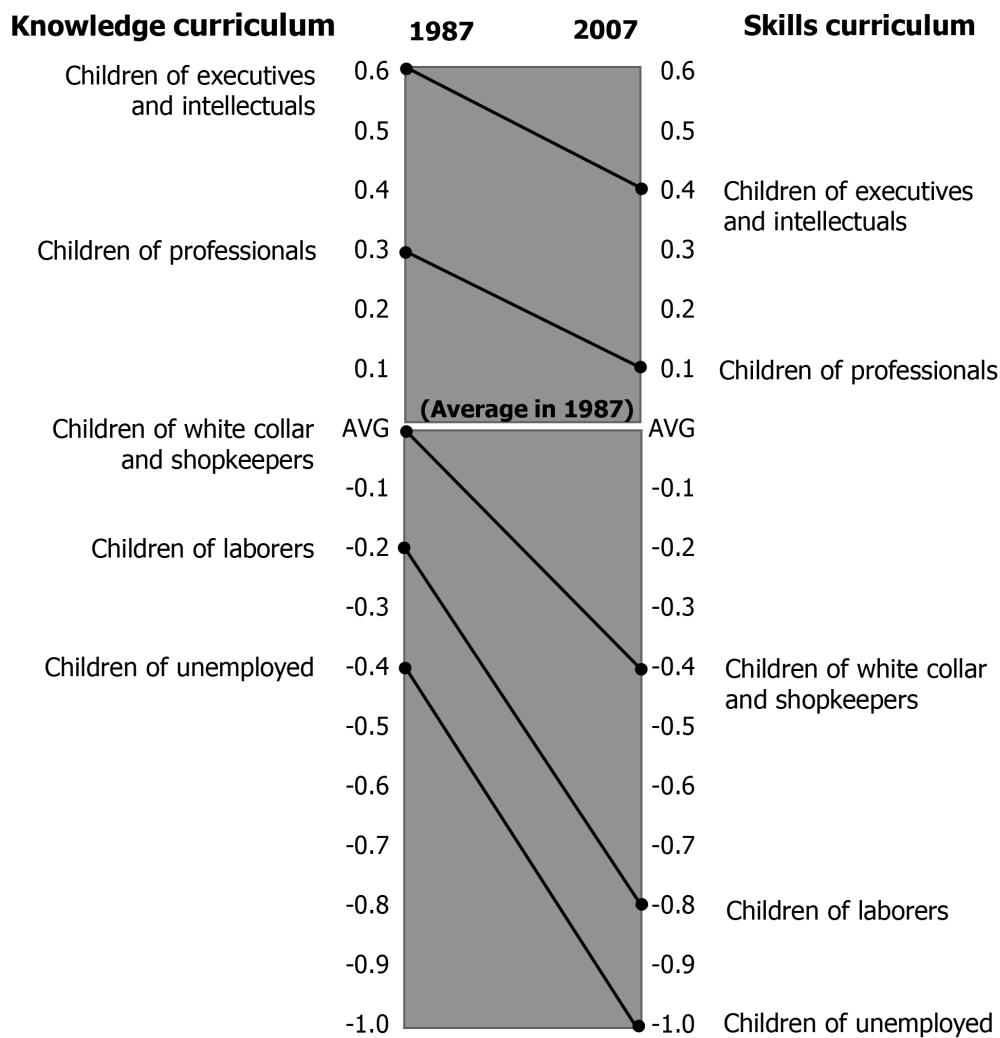
<sup>1</sup> which a country cannot fake.

why it historically has done so well at education, they are shown what is done now (a failing approach) rather than what was done before (a successful Knowledge Rich approach).

Another national example, pointed out by Hirsch, is France. The chart below shows what happened there when a rigorous Knowledge Rich national curriculum was abandoned, in 1987, in favour of localised curricula focused on generalised skills:

**FIGURE 7.2 Curriculum effects in France 1987-2007 at the end of fifth grade**

*A large decline in achievement and fairness*



Note: Vertical scale = z scores for 1987; average in 1987 = 0; average in 2007 = minus .37. Z scores are percentages of the standard deviation of a distribution. They allow results to be compared in different eras, even when the underlying tests use different scales.

Source: p.145, Hirsch, E.D., 2016, *Why Knowledge Matters*, Harvard Education Press

As a result of France's change in approach, all pupils, across the whole of France, saw a decline in performance. Children from every social class saw a deterioration in ability. Most worryingly, children from the poorest families saw the steepest decline, to a level way below that which the previous approach to education had accomplished for them. The cumulative impacts on hundreds of thousands of children every year has been to make the entire rest of their lives, for each child/citizen, more impoverished; less rounded; less fulfilling.

A Knowledge Rich approach avoids the pitfalls of unstructured teaching, as it is built on two important principles:

- **What** is taught over time is carefully chosen, to include powerful, baseline and culturally significant facts, ideas, concepts, and other content
- **How** this knowledge is taught is carefully and coherently sequenced – links within and across subject disciplines are securely made and more effectively learned, so they can be fluently recalled and creatively used and appreciated.

Each curriculum, for each subject and each year, is, in this approach, carefully constructed and delivered to ensure that the individual building blocks of knowledge are sequenced in such a way that pupils can understand, remember and use them to gradually build a full view and understanding of the complex world they live in. The actual content of the syllabus/curriculum would be up to the individual school; 'Knowledge Rich' is more about the way that understanding of the world is imparted to the pupils.

Science explains why a Knowledge Rich approach is so powerful: cognitive scientists have found that our brain works at different speeds, depending on whether we have learned something already, or whether we are relying on "working memory". Working memory contains new information that has not (yet) been memorised, so you have to keep in your head. It has very limited space; the vast majority of individual humans can hold sometimes as little as three, and at most seven pieces of new information at the same time. For any of us, it is tiring retaining pieces of information in our working

memory. Once, however, a piece of information is securely stored in our long-term memory, we can – with increasing mental skill – quickly access and use it, relating it to other stored information or to new data that is being presented to us, and freeing up our brain’s short-term memory space to do more useful and creative thinking.

Scientists believe that because of the way working and long-term memory interact, we learn new things by forming connections with facts we already know. The more we already know about a topic or theme, the more easily we can learn new related information – especially if it is presented in the right order, and if the key links are explicitly brought to our attention.

So, a good Knowledge Rich curriculum looks at everything that needs to be learnt for the whole topic to make sense, and sequences delivery of that knowledge, to allow the child to build a rounded understanding of the specific subject as the year goes on.

It is complicated to formulate a curriculum that carefully threads both across subjects, and up the sequential ladder of knowledge; but once that has been structured, the approach goes on yielding great results for many years. To help kick-start their Knowledge Rich approach, many schools ‘outsource’ much of their curriculum development to established academy chains, such as Harris, West London or Inspiration Trust; who have developed, and marketed, effective curriculum materials and teaching aids.

It goes without saying that the content and sequencing of any curriculum will (and should) be much debated by teachers, and particularly by Heads and Leadership Teams: they are the experts in their subjects. Whilst much of the knowledge to be imparted will be “settled” opinion, a lot will still be contested. There is of course no such thing as the definitive Knowledge Rich curriculum, as E.D. Hirsch and others have been quick to state over the years. For example, both content and sequencing will need to vary from nation to nation, and region to region, whether from specific cultural or other contexts.

There will however always be a large common core of content across

curricula, and particularly within, say, the UK, as we look at our shared historical, geographical and literary heritage. Maths and science curricula will generally be alike globally, given the universal nature of these subjects.

(Of course, in different schools there can and will be differences in curricula beyond the core – and this is something to be celebrated. Societies remember and pass down a diverse variety of material between the generations. If the same topics were taught in every school, then the local material that was not covered would soon fade from collective memory.)



A final key to the Knowledge Rich approach is testing. Testing is good, both because it cements in the knowledge, and because it allows the teacher assurance that the child now possesses the needed knowledge for that level and can go on to the next level of information and complexity. (The expectation that there will be a test in itself helps ensure that the child works to learn the material.) Testing informally during the class; at the end of the class; at the end of the period or term, and in public exams; all are absolutely key to ensure the knowledge is absorbed and retained. Those who wish to abolish or dumb down any, or all, tests or exams must be faced



down; allowing that to happen would massively hurt our children and their life chances.

Overall, at the end of a child's time at a Knowledge Rich school, they will possess a huge amount more knowledge and understanding per subject than schools that don't pursue that approach. Knowledge Rich schools routinely turn out pupils who know twice as much, or more, about their subject as similar pupils in other schools. This is accomplished simply through the systematic and careful way in which the Knowledge Rich school teaches its pupils.

In summary then, at PTE we fiercely advocate the Knowledge Rich approach because it ensures that our country delivers on every child's entitlement to a full appreciation of their country's, and the world's, history, knowledge and culture. Our children are entitled to grow up knowing and understanding, in their own way, the best that has been thought and said, delivered in a way that ensures that each child can make the most creative and powerful use of it in their future lives.

There's a super side-effect to the Knowledge Rich approach: it is transformative for teachers' status and wellbeing. Why? First, the whole-curriculum approach makes the creation of programmes of study, and related resources, a whole-school or trust responsibility (often most easily done by taking packages from elsewhere, and tailoring them for the individual school). This takes the burden off individual teachers to spend hours preparing the content of each day's class, and significantly reduces workload. Second, it puts the focus in the classroom on the 'how' to teach – a true skill – rather than on the 'what'; thus putting teacher's expertise, of actually teaching, in the driver's seat once more.

Given all of this, implementing an effective Knowledge Rich curriculum, and instructing and familiarising the teaching staff in the Knowledge Rich approach, is a hugely important part of how to become a great school – which is why so many in recent years, including us at PTE, insist on its central importance.

In countries that are democracies – where ideas and arguments are, praise be, allowed free rein – the history of education shows that new ideas always bubble to the surface and many of them get implemented. Some will be good; some will be bad. Good or bad, some will take root and others won't. One set of ideas that bubbles up at 50-year intervals is what is known in our generation as a 'progressive' approach. Whenever and wherever it starts being promoted, it must be rebutted, refuted and rejected, It is, basically, the anti-Knowledge Rich approach. The fight for a Knowledge Rich approach to education, and a structured syllabus, will quite possibly continue forever, generation after generation. It is clearly worth fighting for, each and every time.

The former Schools Minister, Nick Gibb MP, recently made [a powerful speech](#)<sup>2</sup> on the importance of a Knowledge Rich curriculum, emphasizing the birthright of every single British Child to both know and understand, for example, Shakespeare; the scientific method; our history; and our cultural heritage. Unless governments continue to make the case, as Nick Gibb did, for a Knowledge Rich approach, then the nation's children will continue to suffer from a lousy education, with their entire future lives adversely affected by this.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-importance-of-a-knowledge-rich-curriculum>

## Questions for parents to ask a prospective school about Knowledge Rich:

- Do you adopt a “Knowledge Rich” approach, seeking to ensure that your pupils leave each year with a pre-planned, fully rounded and complete set of knowledge across every subject?
- Do you believe primarily that students should ‘learn for themselves’ or, rather, that the teacher should systematically impart predefined knowledge to the student?
- Have you considered, or have you adopted or plan to adopt, approaches to learning such as ‘teamwork’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘21st Century skills’, or ‘independent learning’? *(Note: these are innocent-sounding buzz words and phrases but imply the school is adopting a ‘Progressive’ approach.)*
- What is your view of the relative importance of teaching ‘inquisitiveness’ and ‘learning how to learn’, versus imparting content? *(Ditto: ‘Progressive’ versus ‘Knowledge Rich’.)*
- Do you have a ‘3D’ approach to your curriculum, where relevant links are created for the knowledge to be learned across subjects? *(The Knowledge Rich approach.)*
- (On one or all subjects) does the school create its own curriculum itself for each subject, or are some or all curriculum materials ‘bought in’? *(The latter could well be the sensible approach for a particular school.)*
- (For one or several subjects, for one or several years) Please may I have sight of textbooks, workbooks and teaching aids for these subjects/ years? *(Look for a structured, content-rich approach.)*
- What training does the school give your teachers in how to prepare for classes and how to impart knowledge? *(The Knowledge Rich approach focuses on ensuring teachers have the ‘commanding the class’ skills to impart a pre-agreed, school-wide curriculum.)*

# High Ambition

## Supporting every child to reach their goals

**P**TE, and the educational movement it seeks to support, wishes educational excellence for every child. We believe that this will be achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras: Warm/Strict; Knowledge Rich; High Ambition; Wide Curriculum.

So, in detail, what do we mean by... ***“High Ambition”***?

At its simplest, this phrase underlines that children are prevented from achieving their best if they are not set challenging goals and are not convincingly assured that they will be given every support to reach those goals. Their teachers need to firmly believe, and encourage pupils to believe, that those high goals are indeed achievable.

The goals and levels for each particular child will be different, whether it's getting good GCSE Maths and English grades, or getting into Oxbridge; but for every child the goals set for them must be stretching and challenging, pushing the child to the limit of their full potential, seeking the highest outcomes for that child. It doesn't matter what circumstances pupils arrive from, what preconceptions the children arrive with. Once they arrive, everything around them must be organised to prepare them for, and help them achieve, their best possible fulfilled life.

PTE, and the educational movement we support, believes that the starting point of planning and fiercely wanting to achieve great results for the child is a culture that demands the best both from and for children. The school's culture should instil in all children the ambition and motivation to aim for the highest prizes, supporting them to achieve their hopes and dreams.

To make High Ambition work, every aspect of school life has to be designed in a carefully considered and coherent way, helping young people to do and be their best: whether it's the lessons planned, the assemblies held, how

pupils are encouraged to behave in their daily school life, or the exams they sit.

Above all, each child must be instilled with big ambitions and expectations for who they are and what they can become, thus avoiding that soft bigotry of low expectations. All children must be able to see that there is a programme they can follow that will help them reach that high level that their teachers have set for them.



High Ambition is not about encouraging every single child to go to university, or to aim for specific careers or status levels, or to earn a lot of money, or to leave behind their families and hometowns. It is not one-size-fits-all; it is about children growing up feeling that they have not just agency and ambition, but huge potential over what they do in their lives. And it is about equipping them over time with the necessary knowledge, skills, connections, experiences, and attributes to act on this..

Research shows that motivation is a major predictor of achievement in academic situations, being almost as important as intelligence. Children





therefore need to be encouraged to develop an internalised motivation. Drive and ambition are inter-related non-cognitive factors which have shown to be strongly correlated with success; students who score highest on ambition and drive score on average half a grade higher per GCSE than students with the same level of prior attainment, but with lower determination to succeed. This influencer on results has, indeed, a greater effect than that of family background or the school attended.

A focus on High Ambition also helps children become more resilient; resilience is a skill almost as important as cognitive skills for achieving educational qualifications. Children need to be unafraid to try, to learn positive lessons from either failure or success in that experience, and try again. Making it clear to the child that the school practices, and insists on, High Ambition will help develop that needed resilience.

For secondary age pupils, public exams are key for cementing in this High Ambition. Pupils need to know that good public exam grades matter – they are a confirmation of a good education, and the passport to a good university, apprenticeship, or technical college, and, on to a well-paid, satisfying job

and an informed, involved life. Most pupils are capable of good exam grades if they work hard; they need to be told that. They need to learn the meaning of, and expected results from, hard work, spurred on by High Ambition. They need to be tested regularly, so as to ensure they are meeting the high expectations placed on them.

Schools whose approach mirrors that which we at PTE advocate get very good exam results, and many more of their pupils go on to universities, and good careers, than in less ambitious schools.

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”*

High ambition and resilience are both essential for good mental health. Research into neuroplasticity has shown that by explicitly rewarding positive behaviours, we are able to hardwire such behaviours into the brain. According to American psychologist Professor Roy Baumeister, research on negativity bias has shown that unless helped on the positive, upbeat side, we tend to remember, and focus more, on negative experiences. It is therefore particularly important that children experience as many positive experiences as possible, guided and aided by High Ambition, to help them develop into happier, more positive, more successful adults.

It is not for schools to decide unilaterally for their pupils where they should spend the next stage of their lives, what they should do as college students, workers, future adults. However, a good school should and will provide wise counsel and guidance, as well as opening children’s minds to the full range of future possibilities. The school’s role is to help children achieve ‘escape velocity’ – fuelled and powered by a great education – so that children with proper High Ambition are equipped to decide for themselves what they want to do with their life, and where.

High Ambition can take a child to a leading university, or a top-class apprenticeship, or to technical, drama or art school. For each child, as their education develops, their ambition becomes tailored to their specific interests, capabilities and goals.

An essential part of High Ambition is the way that schools and their staff think and talk about their pupils. Schools with High Ambition never say or think *“that kid won’t be able to achieve that”*, but instead ask, *“what must we all do to ensure that that child succeeds?”* Such schools don’t presume *“our pupils won’t find this relevant”* but think *“how do we engage and excite them by this?”*



These schools design a curriculum that will open the whole world up to their pupils – that builds on, and is not limited by, what they already know from their home and community. Such schools level up, not down, and equip their pupils to be able to grapple with the full potential of the world. They don’t dumb things down – behaviourally, emotionally, culturally or intellectually.

This is what is meant by High Ambition. At schools that do it right, each child starts their first and subsequent days at the school internalising the school’s culture; they then solidify that internalised strength throughout their school years, and take that positive culture with them, out into the world, when they finally leave.



## Questions for parents to ask a prospective school about High Ambition:

- Does the school make any explicit statement about having “High Ambition” for its children?
- How does the school translate this into setting levels of ambition for its children? *(There should be a series of detailed statements from the school as to what it expects its pupils to achieve.)*
- How do you ensure ongoing interaction with children to encourage high ambitions and life goals? *(Can each teacher articulate to the parents of every one of their pupils what great goals are being set for each individual child?)*
- How do you expose children to all the possibilities for their future career? *(Careers advice, external speakers, field trips, work placements.)*
- For secondary schools: what percentage of your GCSE class go on to A Level/University/Russell Group/Oxbridge? What percentage to apprenticeships? What percentage to technical college? What is your level of ambition for those percentages? How do you communicate that ambition to your pupils?
- Do your children believe they *can* reach the highest levels? Do they believe they *will*?



# Wide Curriculum

## Developing the whole child

**P**TE, and the educational movement it seeks to support, wishes educational excellence for every child. We believe that this will be achieved when all schools have a strong culture and a great curriculum, underpinned by four key mantras: Warm/Strict; Knowledge Rich; High Ambition; Wide Curriculum.

When schools are built on these foundations, every child can thrive, no matter their background or starting point. Here's the detail of what that means and why on the fourth of these mantras, it's the right approach.

So, in detail, what do we mean by... **“Wide Curriculum”?**

When people talk about a school's curriculum, they are usually referring to the topics that are taught in timetabled lessons in a formal way. Of course, this is a hugely important part of education, and the focus that takes up the majority of time in school. Literature, maths, science, humanities, languages, the arts, technology and more – the knowledge of these areas is what makes us functioning adult humans. There is therefore an overwhelming imperative for every child to understand and enjoy all of them.

Most children don't live with a mathematician, scientist, historian, or linguist. Such important knowledge has to be imparted systematically to children, in schools, over the years. Schools bring pupils together with experts and take them on the learning journey, in well-structured and creative ways that make the learning more memorable, enjoyable and lasting.

So much for the formal curriculum. However, if children are to flourish and receive a knowledge-rich experience in the truest sense, one that helps them develop into fully rounded adults, then they need to experience a wider curriculum, one that goes beyond the formal and 'academic'.

Many wider development experiences will come from family and community and elsewhere. Few families however, will offer a complete enough range



of wider experience for their child to fully grasp and enjoy the world around them. Many of these broader experiences are where schools can – and many do – make a big difference for each and every child, by organising activities, making space in the timetable for them (whether in or outside school hours), and bringing pupils together with experts in many fields.



Just as most of us don't live with academic experts, so most of us don't have at home an opera singer, piano teacher, chess player, football or swimming coach, or indeed a medieval castle just down the road.

The wider curriculum embraces, and builds on, all those really important things that enhance life: sport (for fun as well as for the competition); work experience; solo and orchestral musical performances; drama; chess; clubs and electives; guest speakers on multiple topics; careers advice; competitions; assemblies; culture; concerts; trips and so forth.

House systems, school councils, prefects, debating societies – these provide the opportunity for children to learn about contributing to a democratic process, participating in fora to improve their own school, speak in public,

represent their peers, formulate ideas and proposals, and realise the restrictions of budgets, opposing ideas and the lessons learnt from both winning and losing.

*“A Wide Curriculum represents a substantial part of the educational experience, involving a full choice of activities that take place beyond the academic curriculum – and usually outside the classroom.”*

As part of Warm/Strict (p.9), principles of respect, punctuality, consideration and awareness of the needs of others can and should be practiced not only within lessons, but between and before and after them, on the journey to and from school and within the child’s wider community. As part of Wide Curriculum and its attendant organised sport, choirs, debate, and other such activities, the point of these principles becomes clear.

Wide Curriculum offers students the opportunity to learn about life in its broader context: its challenges and opportunities, the gaining of experience in how to respond to both success and disappointment. Wide Curriculum also highlights the significance and importance of extra-curricular activities, providing the child with a view of the balance to be achieved between academic focus and recreational enhancement.

Wide Curriculum also recognises the importance of ensuring that young people understand and appreciate the core British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, public service, mutual respect and tolerance. The opportunity to discuss these principles can to a degree form part of the formal curriculum through Personal, Social, Health and Economics lessons, but they will be even more successfully promoted within a range of other activities specifically designed to incorporate these values – for example, team sports or debate.

Great schools provide such a wide variety of enriching and stretching experiences in a carefully considered and well-structured way. Just as they do with academic subjects, great schools piece together wider experiences

in a holistic fashion, to ensure coverage and purpose, and to expand horizons. The very best do it in ways that mean the experiences are accessible to everyone, not just the more privileged or leading pupils.

To take just one example of many, in recent years a quarter of primary children leaving for secondary have been unable to swim. Schools must tackle this statistic; swimming is not just an enjoyable hobby and competitive sport but an essential life skill that keeps children safe. Every parent has a legal entitlement that their child's school will teach them to swim.



Again, so many schools have given up on musical education, not even having the instruments for an orchestral or personal performance. Schools have lost access to sports fields and have abandoned team sports; few schools participate in debating contests. None of this shrinking of the curriculum is necessary. Schools with a Wide Curriculum approach don't get into financial difficulty as a result; they just allocate monies differently (e.g. by having fewer Teaching Assistants, an approach that on average doesn't lead to worse academic outcomes.)

Often, but not always, having a successful Wide Curriculum means making



the official school day, or term, a bit longer. Doing that enables some parts of the wider curriculum, such as clubs, to be on the timetable so every child can take part in them. Leaving all of the Wider Curriculum for ‘after school’ means significant dropout by many pupils, as individual children or their parents find reasons (not all of them, of course, good or necessary) to get home.

Wide Curriculum also means creating additional time to allow for days or weeks to be carved out for work experience, careers festivals, projects with other schools and community groups. Wide Curriculum schools organise day trips – locally or further afield – and ensure cultural experiences are had by all, not just those with steady home lives or relatives who have the time, the will, the assets to provide such things themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The means of achieving a Wide Curriculum vary, but the purpose is the same: to ensure that all children are exposed to some of the best that’s being thought, said, and done in our broader culture, so that they have a chance to develop great skills in those areas that interest them. For some, these experiences will uncover a passion or talent to nurture. For others, it will be another piece in the map of their cultural heritage, to learn about and enjoy now, and then draw upon later in life. Either way, it ensures children receive their cultural entitlement. How they make the most of this in their life will be worked out, primarily by the child, over time.

In summary then, for the school to do a great job requires both a knowledge-rich academic ‘core’, *and* a wider, enriching overall curriculum. They’re two sides of the same coin, just different in discipline and delivery, and together they’re the way we can help children to flourish.

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned on the previous page, providing a Wide Curriculum, and expanding school hours to accommodate it, is not limited to schools with exceptional funding sources; successful Wide Curriculum schools say that it is more a matter of careful budgeting, and disciplined choice among expenditure options.

## Questions for parents to ask a prospective school about Wide Curriculum:

- What school clubs do you have (debating, chess, Duke of Edinburgh, drama etc.)?
- What sports activities are there? Where do they take place? Do teams compete in leagues or against other schools?
- What percentage of your children can swim? How often does each of your classes go swimming?
- Does the school have a music teacher? What instruments are taught? Is there an orchestra? A school choir? Do they play or sing at morning assembly or other times?
- What school outings took place last year? What trips are planned for this year?
- Which outside speakers came into school last year, and what classes did they address? What is planned for this year?
- Does the school run a house system, school council, school prefects/monitors?

Great schools are likely to have all of the above and sometimes even more.





# Parents Teachers

FOR EXCELLENCE

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*Warm/Strict - Knowledge Rich - High Ambition - Wide Curriculum*