

FEB 2024

# EDUCATION MATTERS



**EFFECTIVE SCHOOL  
LEADERSHIP**  
**GETTING TO  
THE HEART OF IT**  
**DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF  
TRUST AND COLLABORATION**

Volume 1 | Issue 1

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# INSPIRING GROWTH

## NURTURING MINDS, SHAPING THE FUTURE

**W**elcome to the AISL Academy, a global learning platform for educators, parents and students who have access to the latest and best practices in pedagogy, professional learning and social development, within an international, interactive and interconnected setting. The Academy is a strategic partner and service provider of Asia International School Limited (AISL).

Built upon the AISL Harrow Schools' pillars of educational excellence, the Academy is a collection of high quality and high impact certified and accredited courses, dedicated panel discussions and shared learning events. We believe that learning is for everyone and it is only when we Learn More, we Matter More, as educators, parents, students and as citizens.

Looking back on the achievements and valuable lessons over the past years, we are unwavering in our commitment to offering outstanding professional development opportunities. In this inaugural edition of our educational magazine, we extend an invitation to explore a diverse array of in-depth articles, features, interviews, and analyses covering a range of educational topics.

As we step into the new year, our focus is on building upon internal successes and expanding influence to internal staff, international education professionals, and parents alike. Our dedication remains centered on delivering world-class learning experiences and nurturing a supportive environment for all our stakeholders.

Throughout history, education has been the fundamental pillar of human development and progress. It opens doors to opportunities, empowers individuals, and transforms societies. The education we receive can equip us with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to understand the world, make informed decisions, and shape our lives.

“**E**nabling educators to excel in their roles and positively impact student learning is an ongoing process that requires a collaborative effort from school administrators, policymakers, and the entire educational community. By investing in their professional growth and creating supportive environments, we can empower our teachers.”

### EDUCATION MATTERS

Learning transcends boundaries, and at AISL Academy, we have extended the role of a learning platform to a dedicated support system. Together, as a cohesive international community, the Academy empowers our teachers to elevate the standard of education and ensure positive learning outcomes for our students.

Through a spectrum of professional development opportunities, we present workshops, seminars, conferences, and a diverse array of training programmes. These initiatives grant access to professional learning platforms, online courses, and educational resources, equipping our teachers to stay abreast of the latest research, teaching strategies, and technological advancements.

In our steadfast commitment to transforming education, we proudly introduce the 3A's - AISL Academy (AA), AISL Mall (AM) and AISL Outdoor (AO). These initiatives serve as powerful connectors, bringing together educators, teaching professionals, parents, and students from around the globe. Through these platforms, we cultivate shared learning experiences and enable experiential learning beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. We are reimagining curriculum, pedagogies, and insightful courses while engaging in webinars and hosting exclusive events, all of which contribute to the growth and future of teaching.

By embracing innovation and collaboration, we are revolutionising the educational landscape encouraging educators to explore new horizons and engage in continuous professional development. Together, we can break free from traditional boundaries, transcend geographical limitations, and forge new paths in education. Working in partnership and through shared learning, we can inspire a new generation of educators and students, empowering them to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

Join us on this extraordinary journey as we re-envision, embrace limitless possibilities, and shape the future together. At AISL Academy, we believe that education knows no bounds, and our collective efforts will create a transformative impact that reverberates far beyond the classroom walls. As we embark on this journey together, we invite you to join us in celebrating the power of education. Together, we can shape a brighter and more prosperous future for our children and the generations to come.

Welcome to the AISL Academy's educational magazine, where learning never ceases and knowledge knows no bounds.

”  
**A**s educators, we believe in the latest best practices. This allows us to fulfil our commitment in nurturing personal growth, instilling self-confidence, and fostering a sense of purpose in our students. Through the provision of a robust education and the promotion of global citizenship, our goal is to cultivate a profound understanding, tolerance, and empathy among diverse cultures and societies.



**DANIEL CHIU**  
FOUNDER  
ASIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIMITED



**DR ROSANNA WONG DBE, JP.**  
CHAIRMAN  
ASIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIMITED




# OUR PLEDGE

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS TO EMPOWER  
STUDENTS IN BECOMING THE BEST THEY  
CAN BE







## WHY DO WE SEE TEACHER EXPERTISE AS NEEDING KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND JUDGEMENT ?

(EVEN THOUGH MOST PEOPLE SEEM TO FOCUS ON JUST ONE OF THESE)



“Expertise does not just grow naturally with experience, but it can be developed—given the right conditions. Expertise requires a balance of knowledge, skills, and judgement.”

**ROB COE**  
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT  
EVIDENCE BASED EDUCATION

In their chapter in the second edition of *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, Stigler and Miller claim that “most teacher education and professional development programs for teachers have focused on making teachers more knowledgeable; few actually give teachers opportunity to practice the skills of teaching” (2018, p. 441). Recently, with the growth of interest in coaching and teaching techniques, some approaches to teachers’ development have moved in the opposite direction to focus on classroom skills more explicitly. But these often then seem to place less emphasis on teachers’ theoretical knowledge - as if we can’t have both. And both types generally say little about the importance of teachers’ judgement and intuition.

### THE NEED FOR JUDGEMENT

In some approaches to education improvement, judgement is ruled out entirely. Interventions require “fidelity” and are designed to prevent teachers from deviating from the script, driven by the fear of the “lethal mutations” that often arise when we allow individual teachers and school leaders to make their own choices. Of course, this fear is real and important; given a choice, many teachers and school leaders do indeed make bad choices. Intuition is often wrong, and we are right to be skeptical of where it leads us (Kahneman, 2012). So, a plausible approach is to prescribe ever more tightly, specifying and policing the kinds of compliance required to get faithful implementation of an “evidence-based” programme. Some school leaders also follow this route, mandating “non-negotiables” that all teachers must comply with.

Unfortunately, such approaches to faithful programme implementation have been found to have small effects at best (Lortie-Forgues & Inglis, 2019). Aside from their impoverished view of the complexity of teaching and undermining of teachers’ autonomy - with consequent negative effects on motivation and joy in work - attempts to improve practice by tightening compliance are, on average, simply not very effective.

(It should be noted that there may be some groups of teachers or contexts for which these prescriptive approaches are more effective. In particular, the expertise reversal effect [Kalyuga et al., 2003], whereby novices generally need more structure than experts, may be relevant here.)

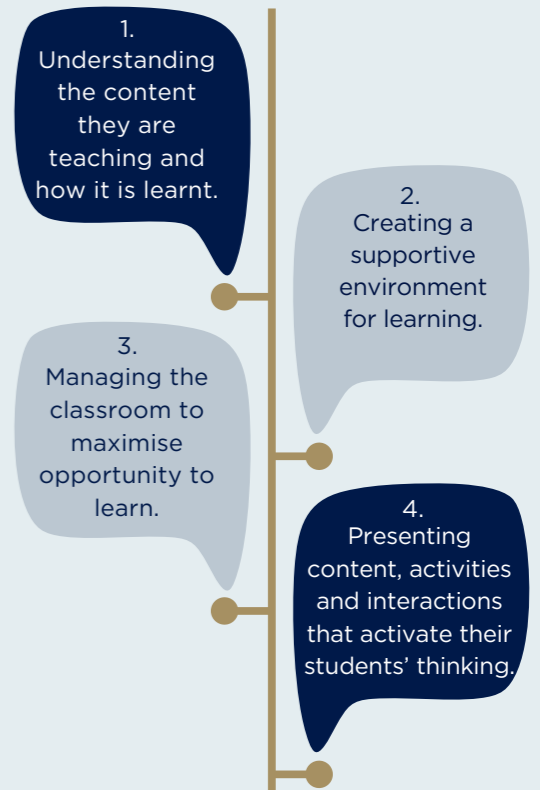
In the Great Teaching Toolkit (GTT), we see teachers’ judgement and intuition as crucial. So much of the complexity of classroom interaction depends on subtle choices teachers make, mostly below the level of conscious awareness. No one can observe classroom practice without being struck by the importance and intricacy of context; the very same practice can be right in one situation and wrong in another. It follows that the way teachers adapt techniques to their context is a feature, not a bug. Adaptation is the lifeblood of effective teaching (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Intuition becomes something we have to work with, to develop and celebrate, not to squash.

And, it turns out, this is a feature of most other kinds of expertise too (Ericsson, 2018). Experts see things differently: they focus on the underlying patterns and structure in a situation, not its surface features; they pay attention to what really matters; they internalise the causal mechanisms that determine outcomes and act on them directly; they predict consequences and evaluate their own impact against these sophisticated counterfactuals; in doing this, they draw on a depth of experience, recognising patterns, constantly formulating, testing and developing explanatory theory (Ericsson, 2018; Stigler and Miller, 2018). All these thought processes can be characterised as “intuition” (Hogarth, 2001). In short, developing teachers’ judgement and intuition is crucial for learning to be more effective.

## A BALANCE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL

Underpinning this intuition is an integrated balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. In the GTT, what teachers need to know is grounded in research evidence. Specifically, the model for Great Teaching that we set out in our evidence review (Coe et al., 2020) provides the structure (see editor’s note below). Great Teachers understand the evidence and formal theory that explain the importance of the model for great teaching.

### THE MODEL FOR GREAT TEACHING





But just understanding the formal theory is not enough: teachers have to be able to apply it in practice in their context and connect their own experiences to it. This more personalised, applied theory corresponds to the notion of a “mental model” that features in most versions of “deliberate practice” (Deans for Impact, 2016; Ericsson & Pool, 2016).

Part of the justification for the importance of knowledge is the need for adaptation, outlined above. If teachers just learn a technique or skill, they may have the kind of “routine expertise” (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986) that allows them to perform this technique effectively under standard conditions. But to be able to adapt and apply it in a different situation they need “adaptive expertise”: an understanding of why, when, how and with what it should be used or modified.

The development of techniques is also a specific focus of the GTT. Sometimes people worry that focusing on techniques may be atomistic and oversimplistic, reducing the complex art of teaching into a set of decontextualised skills. Actually, we learn complex skills most effectively by breaking them down, using “decompositions of practice” (Grossman et al., 2009) to identify, isolate and practise specific elements of classroom teaching. The learning from such practising may be accelerated by using “approximations of practice”—simulations or rehearsal opportunities that are simpler and lower-stakes than the real thing, to scaffold the learning (Deans for Impact, 2016).

Both decompositions and approximations are key elements of deliberate practice (Deans for Impact, 2016). Deliberate practice also requires the development of skills to be supported by challenging and specific goals for improvement, as well as feedback to inform learning. Both goals and feedback are a core part of the GTT environment.

Although teaching skills can be developed and practised in this artificial way, those skills then need to be applied, incorporated and embedded in the classroom. Again, the GTT provides for this, scheduling practice in context to ensure skills become integrated, fluent and automatic.

Further support for this balanced view of expertise is found in the review by Sims et al. (2022) of the impact of CPD. They find that programs that instil insight, motivate goals, teach techniques and embed practice have slightly bigger effects than those that do not do all four. (There are, however, caveats to this support, as the small difference may not be clear, given the number and differences of the studies).

If teacher expertise is the strongest determinant of student achievement, and the main function of professional development is to develop expertise, then how we think about expertise really matters. Expertise does not just grow naturally with experience, but it can be developed - given the right conditions. Expertise requires a balance of knowledge, skills, and judgement. To be effective, professional development needs to address all three.

Designing a CPD package that systematically develops the most powerful knowledge, skills and judgement for all teachers - and then helps them to embed that into everyday practice - is a challenging task. For a school to create something this complex and of high quality is pretty much impossible. Fortunately, the GTT does it all, in a way that is flexible and easy to use.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Sometimes people think the GTT is the Evidence Review, perhaps because it was the first part we published. But the GTT is a genuine toolkit of resources, including evidence summaries, courses, feedback instruments, structures for collaboration, and more. In other words, a comprehensive CPD package.



## KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND JUDGEMENT





“The creation of a culture of excellence requires an investment of time, energy and understanding of how to make change happen. Changing and adapting culture is hard. But the results can be spectacular.”

**DR AHMED HUSSAIN**  
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER  
AISL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIMITED

## DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF TRUST AND COLLABORATION

The AISL 5-Year Strategic Plan focuses explicitly on sustained excellence in performance. A wide body of evidence suggests that performance is a function of culture. Therefore, it is necessary to draw together values, beliefs, behaviours and systems into an organisation and school culture thereby creating the conditions for ongoing high performance. A culture in which people, teams and community strive together with shared trust and collaboration. Conditions that create the roots of permanency in educational excellence must supersede any individual or team. This forms the very DNA of the AISL 5-Year Strategic Plan.

The aim of this article is to provide a framework for leaders at all levels to assist in taking deliberate action to strengthen and promote a culture of excellence. The framework is not designed to be a recipe for creating a culture of excellence but is intended to serve as a reference in supporting leaders to make decisions on how they can approach building a culture of excellence in the context of the organisation and school. To be successful, however, deliberate actions must be aligned to organisation or school strategic plans and implemented in a manner that is inherent to the life of the organisation and school.

A deliberate focus on strengthening or developing aspects of organisational and school culture is founded on a body of research that demonstrates those organisations that do so display the following characteristics:



## DEFINING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

THE DEFINITION USED IN THE PRESENT FRAMEWORK IS TAKEN FROM EDGAR SCHEIN:

*“...the accumulated shared learning of a group as it solves its problems, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore taught to any new member as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave....” (Schein, 2012)*

This definition indicates that culture is generated by shared learning and experience. When these shared experiences result in success or overcoming the challenges faced as an organisation, the values, beliefs, and behaviours that underpinned this experience are perpetuated and sustained. A deliberate focus on both making these explicit and creating conditions for employees to collaborate effectively in solving the problems encountered are argued as being fundamental in building a desirable culture.

Edgar Schein describes key facets of culture that are utilised in the present framework and influence culture. They are:

### 1 Espoused values

These are the values that represent the purpose of the organisation. The ideas, beliefs, language, and behaviours that are to bind the community together and deliver on a shared vision.

### 2 Cultural artefacts

The features of organisational culture that are upheld, celebrated and measured as indicators of the espoused values.

### 3 Tacit cultural assumptions

The beliefs, language and behaviours of individuals and sub-groups of the community in working towards delivering on the cultural artefacts and espoused values. These are often assumed to be positive and supportive of the organisation but can be influenced by policy, systems, and procedures. Geoff Southworth (2016) described the behaviour of individuals or groups that positively contribute to achieving cultural artefacts and espoused values as cultural 'nutrients' and those that do not as cultural 'toxins'. Therefore, to foster a culture of excellence it is necessary to identify and address toxins, whilst celebrating and sharing nutrients.



Alongside a definition for culture, a body of work indicates the following as observable features of a culture of excellence:

- Trust, safety and belonging
- Shared vision, values, beliefs, and goals
- Collaboration and engagement
- Effective communication
- Clarity and coherence about purpose and priority
- Supportive accountability
- Organisation or team being more important than individuals

*This list may serve as an appropriate reference for evaluating school culture.*

## PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO PROMOTING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

Below is a suggested approach that if implemented in whole or in part has been demonstrated to contribute to organisation or school culture. A starting point to strengthening or developing a culture of excellence, it draws on the work of Damian Hughes, who presents a simple and practical model comprising 5 key steps:

### 1. BIG PICTURE

Any organisation seeking to create a culture of excellence needs a really clear sense of purpose, and they need to know what success looks like.

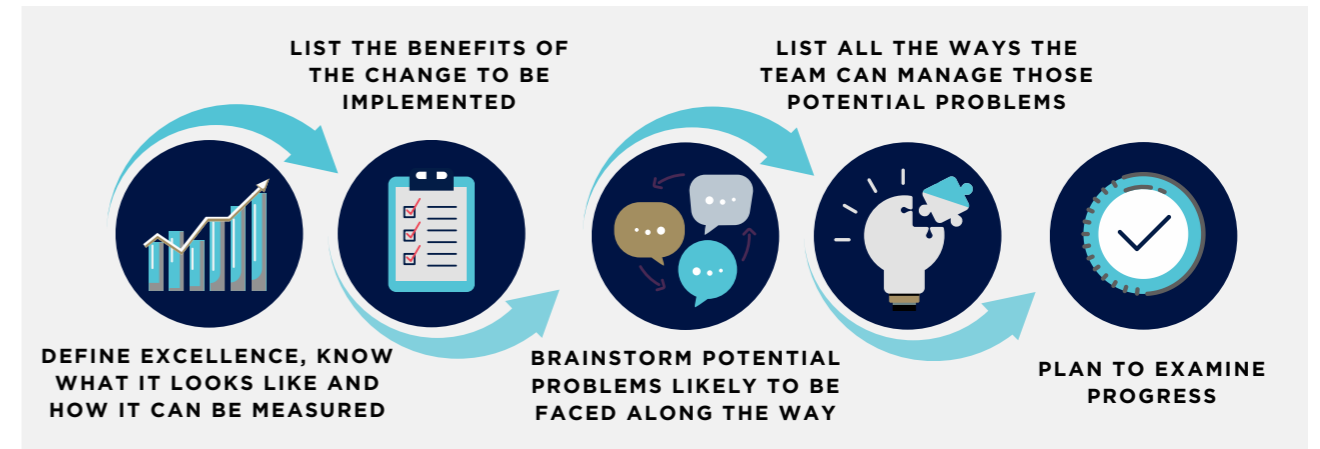
***“Talent will get you in. How you behave determines how long you remain.”***  
***- Txiki Begiristain***

The organisation needs to understand and acknowledge that it is the behaviour of individuals that determines the culture, and therefore there needs to be a focus on behaviours. Damian Hughes recommends that organisations should agree on a maximum of three trademark behaviours that they are committed to. Teams should ask themselves about the behaviours they have demonstrated in the past when being successful as success leaves clues, and then begin to base their culture around these behaviours. Under no circumstances should the organisation flex the rules to accommodate people, no matter how talented they are; akin to Netflix and its ‘don’t tolerate brilliant jerks’ policy.

That is, not simply having and communicating espoused values but knowing what they entail in practice that they can be evaluated and developed. The espoused values become visible and tangible in the fabric of the organisation and school once the associated behaviours are explicit.

## 2. ARC OF CHANGE

High performing organisations are aware of the patterns of change within a culture of excellence. They recognise things like Kanter’s Law; that change is always hardest in the middle. Damian Hughes suggests that leaders can immunise themselves from some of the negative effects of change through a simple exercise, the pre-mortem:



## 3. RECURRING SYSTEMS

For a culture of excellence to become established, people need to consistently exhibit ‘culture of excellence’ thinking and behaviours. Yet typically individuals make at around 10,000 decisions each day, so the human brain often uses mental shortcuts to help (defined by Damian Hughes as ‘Wildebeest Thinking’). If the behaviours are not ingrained and supported by organisational systems, they are unlikely to become established. The solution is recurring, formative feedback. When providing feedback that is evidence-based, relevant, demonstrates consequence of actions, and the behaviour change needs, Wildebeest Thinking can be adapted over time, and our behaviours may start to change. Damian Hughes recommends codifying these behaviours into keystone habits; beliefs and behaviours we can talk about, establish a language for, and measure to demonstrate their presence.

Leaders and leadership are fundamental in culture development through their structures and how individuals are authorised and supported to lead on influencing thinking and behaviour. How leadership is enacted, distributed and authorised are variables that can be controlled, and each contributes to school culture. They not only become a means of securing consistent understanding and commitment to the espoused values but also a mechanism for driving towards securing agreed cultural artefacts and for influencing tacit cultural assumptions.

## 4. CULTURAL ARCHITECTS

People can sometimes behave like pack animals and follow the actions of a leader. Typically, people follow what others do, not necessarily what they say. Within a team or community, pack behaviour is often evident with someone taking the alpha position, the person who takes the lead. In productive teams, this may often be the leader or manager, but not always. Leaders often subconsciously make decisions based on a sense of identity about both themselves and the group. It is essential that the sense of identity leaders portray is aligned with our culture of excellence behaviours.



As a starting point, a deliberate commitment to working with team leaders and colleagues in an alpha position to reinforce the importance of modelling the espoused values, cultural artefacts and defined culture of excellence behaviours can be essential in affirming the position of cultural architects.

## 5. AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Organisations can place a lot of emphasis on the cult of leadership, and the power of a single individual leader, but those principles do not align with a culture of excellence. Research shows that in sport, a head coach has no more than a 10% impact on performance, further reiterating that it is not all about a single leader. If a leader can only have a maximum 10% impact, it is necessary to make sure the right people are recruited into organisations to maximise that 10% and create leaders across teams.

Authentic leaders build trust and confidence amongst the people and teams they lead. They establish systems that perpetuate trust and confidence. Channen-Moran's (2009) five elements that underpin trust that leaders can deliberately employ:



It is to be noted that competence is position last.

Damian Hughes uses Warren Buffett's advice on recruiting: Look for integrity, energy, and intelligence but never recruit anyone with just the last two.

“ A leader without integrity is not a leader.  
They'll kill your culture. ”

“ Leaders create culture. Culture drives behaviour.  
Behaviour produces results - Edgar Schein ”

The creation of a culture of excellence requires an investment of time, energy and understanding of how to make change happen. Changing and adapting culture is hard. But the results can be spectacular.



IT IS NECESSARY TO DRAW TOGETHER VALUES, BELIEFS, BEHAVIOURS AND SYSTEMS INTO AN ORGANISATION AND SCHOOL CULTURE.

A culture in which people, teams and community strive together with shared trust and collaboration.



# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

## REMAINING TRUE TO ONESELF IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS



“We have to give ourselves to our students as the means of their possibility to learn and grow, to inspire them, to light their spark.”

**SIAN CARR OBE**  
SENIOR EDUCATION ADVISER  
ASIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIMITED

**M**any consider Gandhi to be one of the most ethical and compassionate leaders the world has seen. He said ‘In a gentle way, you can shake the world’. Gandhi was a leader who had the ability to step into the shoes of others allowing him to gain an understanding of issues from different perspectives. Effective school leadership must have at its heart compassion and empathy.

We too can shake our world through the business of educating young people, preparing them to be leaders themselves with the ability to shape not only their future but that of the world. We will succeed in this core purpose if we are authentic in our leadership, true to ourselves and to what we believe in - our collectively held values and behaviours must be strong enough to support us through what can often be a challenging and uncertain environment.

But it is not just about values and behaviours, it is also about the skills and knowledge we need to be successful in our leadership. ‘Next Generation’ is a term which is used by technology companies to describe their new improved versions. It is about making improvements to what is already there, an upgrade. As the current generation of leaders, we need to continually ‘upgrade’ what we are doing. As Jose Mourinho, that well known philosophical leader and sometime football manager, says: “If you stand still, you get left behind”. And to continue the sporting theme ice hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky once said: “I skate to where the puck is going, not to where it has been”.

We need to do that as school leaders. The challenges leaders face have changed substantially not incrementally. As Steve Munby and Michael Fullan note in, *Inside out and Downside Up*: “We need leaders who do not just accept the context but act in ways that change the context”. We need to embrace change and seek continuous improvement, not because of external accountability pressure, but because it is our professional responsibility to do so. It is in this way that the quality of education we deliver in our schools will be of the highest quality.

There is an acronym, coined originally in the US Army, but used in the business operating environment, which could equally be applied to our work in schools. It describes well the context in which we operate. The acronym is VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. This combination makes leadership harder than ever. We are under unprecedented scrutiny, the pace of change is not just increasing. It is frenetic. If we are not only to manage this environment but to “change our context” there is a need for a different style of leadership. Command and control will not work. In complexity, you cannot know everything as a leader. Our job is to empower the right people to make the right decisions and do the right thing. It is about a collective moral purpose, collaboration, and capacity building. A school leader has also to be ambidextrous in balancing innovation with accountability. There is no doubt that leading in a VUCA world is exhausting and requires resilience. At times the mental and physical strains can seem intolerable. Our own work life balance needs to be protected too if we are to be successful in this environment.

I am sure you are familiar with Simon Sinek’s “Start with Why” approach to marketing and business. He sets out a hypothesis that too many organisations start with what they do and how they do it, but do not engage their customers/clients in their core purpose, their cause, their ‘why do we get up in the morning’, their WHY. A compelling WHY is vital if we are to lead our schools successfully and strategically. It provides a shared vision and sense of purpose. It overrides cynicism and fatigue.

CPDL and career development is highly dependent on the quality of leadership in any individual school or college, but a well led organisation will give this a very high priority indeed. It will see professional learning as a vital component of their improvement journey as well as the way in which they can retain teachers and grow them into leaders, both for the benefit of their own school, but also the wider system. Our future leaders need to be continually developed and feel that we are investing in them. We need to nurture them. We need to make them feel valued. Our approach to their growth and development should be balanced, thoughtful and measured, so that they feel supported, but not rushed, so that they can make mistakes, regroup, and move forward with renewed confidence.





And so, to our core business and the collective moral responsibility we have to deliver the very best education for Generation Next, the young people we educate. It is their future. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, encapsulates this far better than I can: “There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace”. We should never waver or be distracted from the brilliant business of educating young people!

So, what does this all mean for the kind of education we need to provide for this generation and those to come? Are we educating for a world we have known, for a world which we hark back to in a rose-tinted spectacles kind of way? Are we educating for a world which reflects the present, the uncertainties, the dangers, the worries, the concerns, the conflicts, the division? Or are we educating for a world which takes us forward, which is bold, which accepts the challenges but seeks solutions, which reflects the world as seen and lived and experienced by many of our young people? Our curriculum in its broadest sense must allow young people to develop the skills and competencies to operate in the world - a world which embraces ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Young people if they are to prosper need to have a sense of place in this world and as educational leaders, we need to support them in achieving this. And the curriculum we offer needs to create a world of opportunities for our young people. We need to open frontiers for them. This is about instilling in our students the qualities of mind and character that will enable them to develop their understanding of the world, form judgements, take risks and make a difference. That is what a principled education provides. Learning-centred leadership is at the heart of effective school leadership.

**If we are not only to manage this environment but to “change our context” there is a need for a different style of leadership. Command and control will not work.**

“**Are we educating for a world which reflects the present, the uncertainties, the dangers, the worries, the concerns, the conflicts, the division? Or are we educating for a world which takes us forward, which is bold, which accepts the challenges but seeks solutions, which reflects the world as seen and lived and experienced by many of our young people?**”

I remember well having as my leadership bible in my first years of headship in the late nineties the trilogy of *What's Worth Fighting For* books written by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan. They described the school environment in the late nineties as complex, turbulent, contradictory, relentless, uncertain, and unpredictable. They articulated the importance of teacher and leader advocacy, and agency. We work in a context of rapid change and whilst this is challenging, we need to be strong and remain committed to our principles and values as educators.

As leaders, we endeavour every day to ensure that there are multiple doors and windows open for all those we educate, that they have a sense of all the opportunities available to them. They are just starting out on their journey of possibility. We have to give ourselves to our students as the means of their possibility to learn and grow, to inspire them, to light their spark. We need to be ready in turn to catch their spark, to be inspired equally by them. It is why it is the best job in the world to lead a school!



**A COMPELLING WHY IS VITAL IF WE ARE TO LEAD OUR SCHOOLS SUCCESSFULLY AND STRATEGICALLY.**

It provides a shared vision and sense of purpose. It overrides cynicism and fatigue.



# FEATURED INTERVIEW

## WITH DAME ALISON PEACOCK

INTERVIEWER: DR NEELAM PARMAR



*Dame Alison is at the forefront of shaping the discourse on effective leadership in education. She delves into key principles of leadership, pressing challenges, evidence-informed practices, collaboration, and professional development, seeking insights that can inspire and guide educators and leaders alike.*

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)  
THE CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING

### **Please can you give an introduction of yourself and your journey to becoming CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching.**

My name is Alison Peacock and my professional journey has been rooted in education. I have dedicated my entire career to teaching, having worked in both secondary and primary education, across various contexts such as early years and special needs. My experiences led me to serve as a primary head teacher, where I successfully transformed a failing school into an outstanding one. Subsequently, it evolved into a teaching school, forming an alliance of schools under my leadership.

Despite these accomplishments, I felt a deeper calling to influence the broader education system. The opportunity arose when I saw the position of the founding CEO at the Chartered College. I saw this as a chance to lead a new professional body and charity, aiming to foster collaboration, research, and the exchange of impactful ideas in education.

Throughout my career, I have been passionate about collaboration, research, and exploring transformative ideas that can benefit not only my classroom but classrooms across the board. Leading a professional body that empowers knowledgeable teachers, builds respect, and provides accreditation through membership seemed like the ideal avenue to share best practices. Together, with the dedication of our team, we have built the Chartered College from the ground up, reaching a membership of over 45,000 with a global impact.

What sets us apart is our independence from government funding, allowing us to be a voice of truth when needed. We strive to be inclusive, embracing diverse perspectives and presenting educators with a spectrum of evidence. We trust professionals to make informed decisions based on their expertise, offering guidance rather than prescribing solutions. We're thrilled about the growth of the college and the positive impact we are making in the education landscape.

### **In your opinion, what are the fundamental principles necessary for effective educational leadership among educators?**

I believe the first crucial principle is the need to build trust, and that is no easy task. Trust-building is reciprocal, not only about being trusted by others but also gaining their trust by trusting them. This reciprocity of trust is fundamental. It involves trusting colleagues to behave professionally, expecting the best from them, and fostering an environment where trust is at the core. Expecting the best from others is vital, as you are more likely to find goodness when you anticipate it. So, high expectations based on trust are key.

Additionally, being a good listener and creating listening organisations is essential. As a leader, it is easy to arrive and dictate what needs to happen. However, the most effective leadership involves taking teams along and creating a sense of co-agency where everyone feels part of something. People should feel they are contributing to the story without realising they are being led.

Furthermore, having a clear vision is crucial. In my case, the vision revolves around enhancing the teaching profession for the betterment of our children's opportunities. A clear vision provides direction and purpose, and it's integral to effective leadership.

### **At a time of constant change, what are the most pressing issues in education today and how can educational leaders contribute to addressing these challenges?**

I believe one of the foremost challenges and opportunities in education today revolves around the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The rapid development of AI presents a dual aspect - both a significant challenge and a tremendous opportunity. In certain regions, governments are embracing the idea of automating classrooms, diminishing the role of teachers to that of technicians. The perspective here is that highly paid professionals are not essential, as students can simply engage with videos, complete tasks, and undergo remote assessments.

However, I see a profound opportunity for educators to leverage AI's capabilities to enhance their teaching practices. It is crucial to focus on how we can ensure the preservation of human skills amidst this technological shift. We need to prioritise skills such as teamwork, kindness, debates, and critical thinking. This emphasis should extend to collaborative curriculum components like physical education, dance, and sports.

The key lies in maximising the potential of these human-centric areas while harnessing the positive aspects of AI. It's about finding a balance between the two. There is enormous potential for improvement, but my concern lies in the potential commercialisation of education. The intersection of commerce and education is not always smooth, and if governments overly prioritise artificial teachers for commercial reasons, it might lead us down the wrong path. Therefore, educational leaders need to navigate this landscape carefully, ensuring that advancements in AI enhance the learning experience rather than compromise the essence of education.



“

**People should feel they are contributing to the story without realising they are being led.**



**The Chartered College of Teaching emphasises evidence-informed practice. How can educational leaders ensure that their decisions are grounded in sound research and best practices?**

At the Chartered College of Teaching, we advocate for a thoughtful approach to decision-making, emphasising analysis that combines intuitive wisdom with the most promising research outcomes. Educational research can be challenging, often rooted in sociology and not always easily quantified. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully select research that demonstrates promise and has a positive impact at scale, providing valuable insights for teachers.

In navigating this landscape, leaders should not only rely on research but also integrate their intuition and first-hand knowledge of how students learn in their specific contexts. It is about finding a balance and making decisions about pedagogy that align with the unique needs of the students and the learning environment.

While educational initiatives within groups of schools may create a standardised approach, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of teaching styles. Teachers should draw inspiration from various sources, sharing practices through platforms like our journal, where both educators and academics contribute. Learning from each other fosters a collaborative environment and encourages the exploration of new ideas.

Moreover, we offer the chartered route for teachers to study, providing a structured path that enhances their understanding of research and best practices. This program aims to develop their wisdom in applying research findings to their teaching methods effectively. Ultimately, our goal is to create a supportive community where teachers share experiences, engage with research, and continuously improve their practices for the benefit of student learning.

**This leads very nicely to our next question. How would you want to foster a collaborative culture within educational institutions?**

Building a collaborative culture within educational organisations is crucial and I believe it stems from a shift in our approach. Over the years, we have witnessed extensive monitoring of teachers and school improvement efforts. What I've observed is that successful collaboration is grounded in cultivating strong relationships among colleagues.

The key is to foster an environment where teachers feel comfortable saying, "Maybe I could try this," without the worry of being excessively scrutinized to the point of feeling paralysed. This is essential for colleagues to engage in constructive dialogue, share insights, and collectively explore innovative teaching methods. Too often, educators hesitate to experiment or share ideas due to the fear of judgment.

When the focus shifted from judgment to improvement, the same group of teachers, except one, played a crucial role in turning the school into an outstanding one. It underscores the power of collaboration and the impact it can have on professional growth.

**How do you think leaders support ongoing professional learning for educators within their organisations?**

Supporting ongoing professional learning for educators is a multi-faceted endeavour. It extends beyond conventional courses and encompasses various approaches. This could involve sharing journal articles, allowing time for reading and subsequent discussion groups. Alternatively, it might entail watching educational videos collectively, participating in short courses, or engaging in online and face-to-face learning experiences.

The key is to diversify development opportunities and consistently tie learning back to the specific context of the educators' work. For instance, educators can reflect on how a new approach discussed in a course might be applied in their classrooms. They can consider its potential impact on their students and explore ways to implement it effectively.

Moreover, fostering a collaborative learning environment is crucial. Educators can work together, perhaps in small groups, to experiment with a particular teaching approach. This collaborative effort allows for evaluation and reflection on the outcomes, providing a sense of ownership over their professional development.

In essence, creating a conducive professional learning environment is akin to nurturing the deep connections necessary for meaningful learning experiences. Much like children, educators benefit from approaches that go beyond surface-level engagement. While some may respond to traditional learning methods, fostering profound connections requires a more nuanced understanding of the teaching and learning process.

Ultimately, leaders play a pivotal role in establishing and sustaining an environment that encourages continuous professional learning. This, in turn, empowers educators to collaborate effectively, enhancing the quality of education for the benefit of their students.

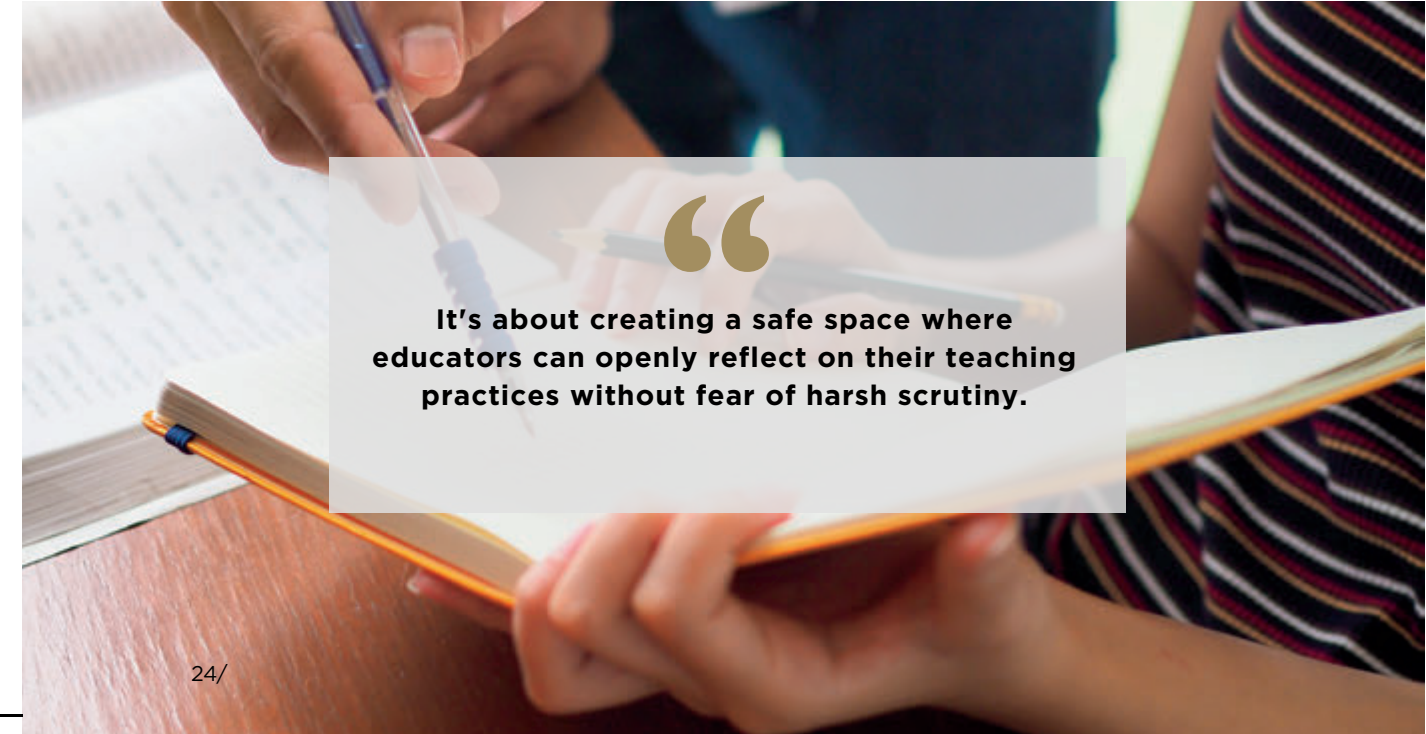
“ When the elements of compassion, quality teaching, and optimal resources come together, incredible things can happen. However, the linchpin remains the teachers themselves – individuals with a genuine passion for the well-being and development of their students. ”

**If you had a crystal ball, what trends would you foresee in educational leadership, and what advice would you give to aspiring leaders in the field?**

In envisioning the future, my hope is for the emergence of compassionate leaders in education. These leaders would recognise that education goes beyond mere exam results. It encompasses the overall well-being and sense of flourishing for both staff and students. The time spent in school or college is significant, so it is essential to make that time as enriching as possible.

We need to focus on building a sense of community and nurturing the whole child. Consideration for the well-being of our staff is crucial because a teacher under constant pressure and exhaustion cannot effectively impart knowledge. Similarly, a student facing challenges at home may struggle to learn. By creating a compassionate environment and ensuring access to the best teachers and resources, we set the stage for remarkable achievements.

When the elements of compassion, quality teaching, and optimal resources come together, incredible things can happen. However, the linchpin remains the teachers themselves – individuals with a genuine passion for the well-being and development of their students. I cannot emphasise enough how admirable and essential the teaching profession is. Teachers are truly amazing.



“  
**It's about creating a safe space where educators can openly reflect on their teaching practices without fear of harsh scrutiny.**”





# FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE

## NURTURING FUTURE-READY THINKERS

There will be more initiatives and more ideas as we move through the year. The key, though, is our central philosophy, supported by a developing understanding of how to communicate this. We want parents to feel that they own the school. Pupils too, of course. And staff. And parents as well. We do this by saying: you are the experts too. Our job, as teachers have come to understand over the years, is to educate the child, our specialist knowledge a means by which we do this. It is not to “deliver” our subject or subjects. Our parents therefore have expertise that we need; collectively, they have expertise and wisdom that supports the whole school community in all that we do.

**IN SCHOOLS, ONE CANNOT JUST BECOME BETTER BY ONE’S SELF.**

*Decisions need to be made as a result of strategy and joined up thinking. A good leader will support a colleague in rising to the challenge by helping them set ambitious, yet achievable goals.*

## ADAPTING TO A DYNAMIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Flexibility in education refers to the capacity to adapt teaching methods, curriculum, and instructional strategies to cater to diverse learning styles and needs. It involves creating an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that embraces change and encourages exploration.

One of the key aspects of flexibility in education is the recognition that students have unique strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. Educators who incorporate flexibility into their teaching practices can tailor their approaches to meet individual needs, promoting engagement and enhancing learning outcomes. This may involve differentiating instruction, utilising various teaching methodologies, and leveraging technology to facilitate personalised learning experiences.

## GRIT AND PERSEVERANCE

Flexibility also allows educators to embrace innovative approaches and adapt to emerging trends in education. It encourages the integration of new technologies, interdisciplinary learning, and real-world applications. By incorporating flexibility into the curriculum, educators can provide students with the necessary skills to navigate an ever-changing world, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and adaptability.

Educators play a crucial role in fostering resilience by creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment. By providing constructive feedback, encouraging risk-taking, and promoting a safe space for exploration, educators can empower students to develop resilience. When students encounter difficult tasks or encounter obstacles, they are more likely to view them as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers.





## THE SYNERGY OF FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE IN EDUCATION

Resilience also involves equipping students with effective coping strategies, stress management techniques, and self-regulation skills. Teaching mindfulness, promoting self-reflection, and providing resources for mental health support are essential components of building resilience in students. By developing these skills, students are better prepared to handle academic pressures, manage their emotions, and maintain overall well-being.

Flexibility and resilience in education are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Flexibility enables educators to adapt their teaching approaches to cater to diverse learning needs, while resilience empowers students to embrace challenges and persist in their learning journeys.

Together, flexibility and resilience foster a student-centered approach to education, promoting active engagement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. When students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and are provided with the necessary tools and support to navigate obstacles, they become more independent, self-driven, and adaptable.

Furthermore, the synergy between flexibility and resilience prepares students to thrive in a rapidly changing world. It equips them with the skills and mindset needed to embrace innovation, face constant adversities, and continuously learn and grow throughout their lives. These qualities are particularly valuable in an era where technological advancements, globalization, and evolving career landscapes require individuals to be agile, adaptable, and resilient.

In the realm of education, flexibility and resilience have become essential attributes for both educators and students. By embracing flexibility, educators can create dynamic learning environments that cater to diverse student needs and foster innovation. Meanwhile, nurturing resilience in students equips them with the ability to persevere through challenges, maintain motivation, and cultivate a growth mindset.

As educational paradigms continue to evolve, it is imperative to prioritise the development of flexibility and resilience in education. By doing so, educators can empower students to become future-ready learners who are equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world, embrace change, and contribute meaningfully to society.



**AISL ACADEMY IS COMMITTED TO OFFERING A DISTINCTIVE EDUCATION IN AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOMS**

*We invest in educators and students for the pursuit of educational excellence, and we support teaching professionals and parents with on-the-go solutions at school and at home.*





# AISL ACADEMY (AA)

## NURTURING GROWTH AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, teachers and educators face unprecedented challenges. The AISL Academy, established with a clear objective to support and nurture continuous learning, emerges as a beacon of professional development and growth. By addressing the changing pedagogic needs and complexities of the modern world, AISL Academy aims to empower educators with the knowledge and skills they need to excel.

Since its online launch in August 2021, AISL Academy has quickly established itself as a global platform for professional development in education. It offers educators access to the latest and best practices in pedagogy, professional learning, and social development. Through an international, interactive, and interconnected setting, AISL Academy creates a dynamic learning environment that transcends physical boundaries.

Drawing on the strengths and excellence of AISL Harrow Schools, the Academy provides a collection of high-quality, certified, and accredited courses. These courses are designed to have an impact on educators professional growth and development. Additionally, dedicated panel discussions and shared learning events encourage the exchange of ideas and best practices, fostering a community of growth-oriented educators.

## EMPOWERING EDUCATORS FOR EXCELLENCE

AISL Academy caters to a diverse range of educators, including international education professionals and those involved in both international and bilingual K-12 education. By collaborating with world-renowned educational institutions and specialists, AISL Academy ensures that educators, parents, and students have access to a wide range of learning opportunities.

With a commitment to building a professional community, AISL Academy provides educators in Asia with access to the highest quality global learning opportunities under truly bilingual conditions that suit the local context. With a global network of recognised education thought leaders and training institutions, Academy members can access the best bilingual professional development courses from around the world.

## ADAPTABILITY AND FUTURE GROWTH

One of the key strengths of AISL Academy is its adaptability. By seamlessly integrating bilingual, online, onsite, and blended learning settings, the Academy can cater to the diverse needs of educators worldwide. Striving to stay ahead of the curve and maintain global competitiveness, AISL Academy positions itself as the one stop platform for continuous professional development.

In partnership with top education institutions, the most respected visionaries, and globally renowned industry-leading professionals in the world, AISL Academy empowers members to learn from international models of excellence to design educational methods and benefit from thoughtful and assessment of international education trends.

Looking to the future, AISL Academy is planning to establish a physical campus in Bangkok, Thailand. This physical presence will further enhance the Academy's ability to provide hands-on, immersive learning experiences for educators.

By offering a comprehensive range of certified courses, facilitating knowledge sharing, and adapting to various learning environments, AISL Academy is committed to supporting educators in their professional growth and development. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the Academy is poised to remain at the forefront of continuous professional development, transforming education and shaping the future of learning.



**AISL ACADEMY**  
**AISL MALL**  
**AISL OUTDOOR**



# AISL MALL (AM)

## YOUR ONE-STOP HUB FOR K-12 EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

AISL Mall is a comprehensive directory that serves as a one-stop hub for K-12 educational products, services, and resources. It provides schools, teachers, parents, and students worldwide with a convenient platform to explore, compare, and access the latest and most trusted educational offerings.

From curriculum materials and teaching aids to technology solutions and specialised programs, AISL Mall is designed to meet the diverse needs of educational communities globally. Notably, AISL Mall features a collection of educational blogs authored by industry experts and thought leaders, offering valuable insights, ideas, and tips to enhance teaching practices, improve student outcomes, and foster dynamic learning environments.



“When the elements of compassion, quality teaching, and optimal resources come together, incredible things can happen.”



## DISCOVER, COMPARE, AND CHOOSE WITH CONFIDENCE

With its carefully curated range of options, AISL Mall offers a world of exploration, comparison, and access to top-notch educational products, services, and resources. Join the AISL Mall community and elevate your educational experience, empowering learners to reach new heights.

## AN IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

What sets AISL Mall apart is its unwavering commitment to quality and trustworthiness. Every listed product, service, and resource undergoes a rigorous vetting process by top leaders in the educational industry, ensuring the highest standards of educational excellence. Whether you are a teacher seeking innovative teaching materials, a parent in search of supplemental learning resources, or a school administrator looking for cutting-edge educational solutions, AISL Mall caters to all educational needs.







## AISL OUTDOOR (AO)

### UNLEASHING THE POWER OF LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM WITH AISL OUTDOOR

AISL Outdoor is a transformative programme that immerses students in a natural environment, fostering values, attributes, and skills that will shape them into future leaders. Through experiential and collaborative-based learning, AISL Outdoor empowers students to apply their knowledge and develop essential life skills.

The core philosophy of AISL Outdoor is to challenge students' perceptions, enhance their resilience, and contribute to their personal development. By engaging in activities that take them out of their comfort zones, students develop new patterns of behavior and gain a deeper understanding of their own capabilities. They learn to adapt to different environments, overcome obstacles, and work together as a team. These experiences become the building blocks for character development, instilling qualities that will serve students well throughout their lives.

AISL Outdoor recognises that character development is an ongoing journey that occurs both inside and outside the classroom. By embracing the natural world as a classroom, students gain a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of knowledge, skills, and personal growth. They learn that learning is not confined to textbooks and lectures but can be found in the great outdoors as well.

## SUMMER PROGRAMMES

### EMBRACE NEW CHALLENGES, UNLEASH HIDDEN POTENTIAL

Our summer camps are an exhilarating blend of adventure, skill-building, and personal development. Students embark on exciting activities that push their boundaries, build resilience, and foster teamwork. From navigating challenging trails to conquering thrilling outdoor challenges, students gain a newfound confidence that extends far beyond the summer season. These programs are the perfect platform for students to discover their strengths, develop essential life skills, and forge lifelong friendships.

## WINTER PROGRAMMES

### EMBRACE THE MAGIC OF THE SEASON

Winter is a time of wonder and excitement, and AISL Outdoor offers programmes that allow students to fully experience the beauty and challenges of the season. Through activities tailored to teach independence, perseverance, and the ability to thrive outside their comfort zone, students gain a deeper appreciation for nature's winter landscapes. Whether it's skiing down snow-capped mountains or embarking on winter survival expeditions, students develop resilience, adaptability, and a sense of wonder that will stay with them throughout their lives.

## SCHOOL HOLIDAY ESCAPES

### IMMERSE YOURSELF IN OUTDOOR LEARNING ADVENTURES

School breaks are a time for exploration, creativity, and personal growth. AISL Outdoor offers school holiday escapes that provide students with enriching experiences and opportunities to connect with nature. From engaging in outdoor art workshops to participating in environmental conservation projects, students expand their horizons, nurture their creativity, and develop a profound appreciation for the natural world. These escapes are not just vacations - they are transformative experiences that cultivate a lifelong love of learning.

AISL Outdoor programmes foster strong connections between students, mentors, and the environment. We believe that by experiencing the wonders of nature firsthand, students develop a deep sense of responsibility and become passionate advocates for environmental sustainability. Every individual is equipped with the knowledge and skills to make a positive impact on the world.

Our ultimate goal is to nurture the next generation into exceptional individuals who possess not only outstanding abilities but also strong character traits that will enable them to thrive in an ever-evolving world. We invest in their growth, fostering their lifelong passion for learning and unlocking their leadership potential. By doing so, we are equipping them with the skills and mindset needed to achieve remarkable success and make meaningful contributions to the broader community.

For more information on AISL Outdoor's programmes, please visit <https://aisloutdoor.com>



A photograph of a female teacher with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a pink sweater, smiling as she reads a purple book to four young children. The children are gathered around her, looking at the book with interest. The background shows a classroom with colorful decorations and educational toys.

**OUR  
COMMITMENT**  
INVESTING IN EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS  
IN PURSUING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE





“Appoint for attitude, train for skills’. If someone has the right attitude and are aligned to our values they can after be upskilled in those areas where they need training.”

**ANN HAYDON MBE**  
HEADMISTRESS  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, HONG KONG.

## CULTIVATING A POSITIVE CULTURE THE LEADERS GUIDE

### LEADERSHIP: DO YOU NEED A LADDER OR A COMPASS?



On your leadership journey, should you take a ladder or a compass?

The answer depends on whether you are trying to build a career or have a fulfilling life.

There is a naive notion that the leadership journey is a straight line to the top and that there is a need to keep climbing the rungs of the ladder. This is something I don't believe. Hard as it can be to accept, the best way to manage your career is not to feel the pressure to keep climbing and higher in a given time period. Sheryl Sandberg favours the idea of a career "jungle gym" where people can move up, down or across. In the book *Lean In* she says that "true leadership stems from individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed. Leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection." Becoming an authentic leader requires building your character and experience.

What I am saying is that leadership is very much about relationships and I believe that truly effective leaders are distinguished by both IQ and EQ. Without 'emotional intelligence' a person can have the best training in the world, an analytical mind and an endless supply of smart ideas but won't necessarily make them a great leader.

### SO, WHAT DO GREAT LEADERS HAVE IN COMMON?

Great leaders remain positive at all times. This is not to say that they live in a 'sugar coated land of happiness' but there is a need to maintain a steady ship and remain optimistic whatever challenges you face.

Great leaders remain calm and confident. Brian Tracy says that "Leaders think and talk about solutions. Followers think and talk about problems".

### Great leaders LISTEN.

In our case, to pupils, staff, parents. They subscribe to undefended leadership. Open themselves up to constructive feedback and reflection. Embrace it and learn from it.

### Great leaders are prepared to take RISK.

Entrepreneurial educators grow as a result of experience and encourage risk taking in others.

### Great leaders act as role MODELS.

They lead by example and live in a goldfish bowl. Everything you say and do is noted. Leaders need to walk the talk.

### Great leaders BUILD TEAMS which are better than themselves.

They are self-aware and ensure the team compensate for their weaknesses. They are not insecure and continually challenge and develop the skill of the team. Richard Branson says I look to hire my weaknesses. Personality before CV. A person who has multiple degrees in your field isn't always better than someone with broad experience and a wonderful personality may need support to develop. My own team will have heard me state on multiple occasions 'Appoint for attitude, train for skills'. If someone has the right attitude and are aligned to our values they can after be upskilled in those areas where they need training.

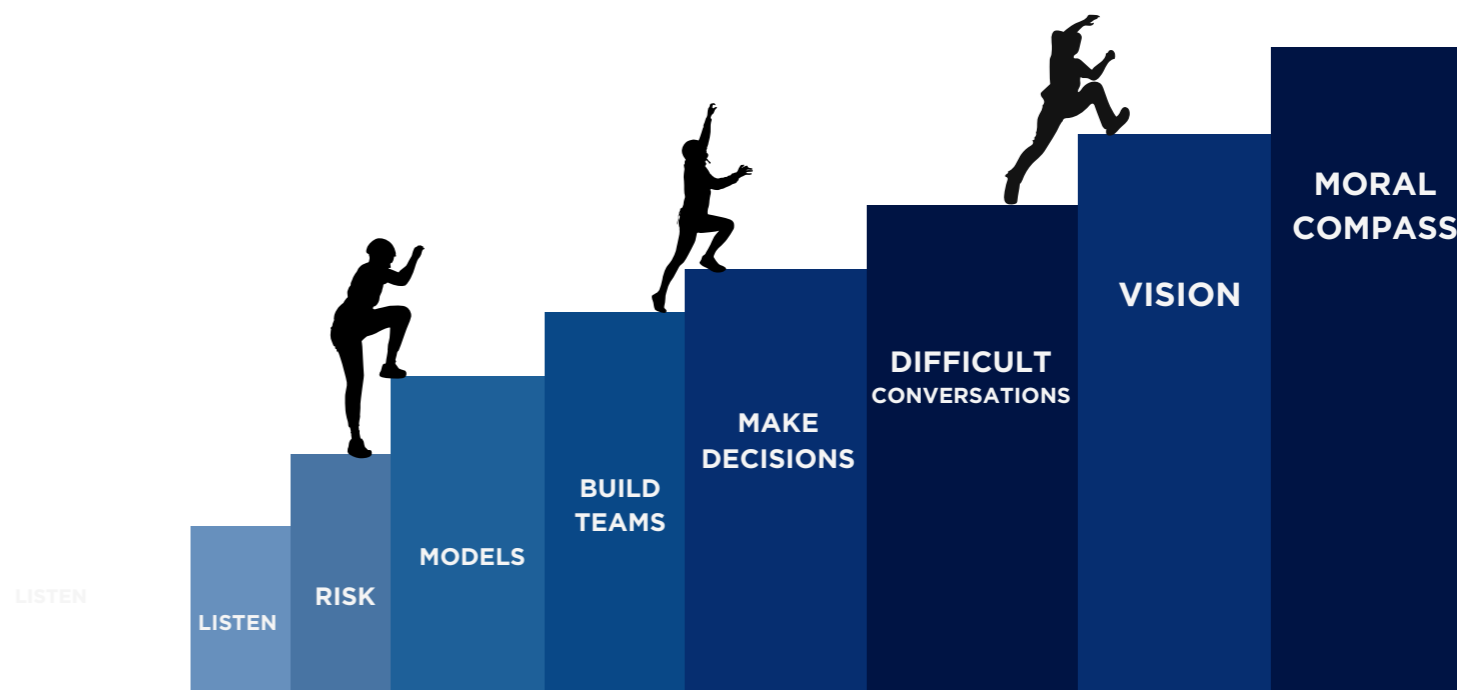
### Great leaders take responsibility and ultimately MAKE DECISIONS.

### Great leaders tackle DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS.

### Great leaders have a VISION and see the bigger picture.

### Great leaders have their own MORAL COMPASS and are AUTHENTIC.

The basis of authenticity lies in the values you hold in your 'true north'.







“We have to build a culture of genuine engagement and ownership, offering parents the chance to share in the leadership of our curriculum, our teaching and learning, our broader curriculum, and our identity.”

**ALEX REED**  
HEAD MASTER  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, SHANGHAI

# LEADING WITH PARENTS

## BUILDING A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

I stopped giving the “Parents Evening” letter to my parents when I was fifteen. They didn’t seem to mind. My mother had enjoyed being told annually she was a good mother rather than in, my Nonna’s words, delivered with a regretful sigh, an occasionally disappointing one. But she had other adventures to live as I got older, most of my grades seemed to be fine and, well, no news was good news.

She wasn’t alone. An English teacher in the 1990s, I saw most of my pupils’ parents twice a year. The conversation would usually follow the same pattern:

**“Is there anything in particular you’d like to know?”**  
**“Is she doing her homework? Behaving in class?”**  
**“Oh yes”**  
**“That’s good.”**

I would then give them the information I wanted to pass on, push books in their direction, talk about reading and, should the child be in attendance, ask them questions about their learning, their ambitions, their reading. The conversations were (generally) warm, pleasant and affirming for everyone.

Reports went home too: usually one written and one almost entirely composed of numbers. In one of my schools, a very good West London comprehensive, we sent home termly reports with nothing but progress and attainment data: a sea of digits, floating on white paper, spinning in a void. Each school had its own habits and traditions, but they were united in their fundamental approach to parents: we had a duty to inform them; they were essential in supporting us when we needed their help to redirect a child’s efforts; and that was about it.

There are, of course, longer traditions of parental involvement in many schools. It wouldn’t be unusual to find active governing bodies, well-connected to the community and able to channel concerns to the school. Even in these instances, though, there would be few opportunities for parents to take a lead, or to have an active voice in areas that might be considered the domain of ‘experts’. In other words, parents could take the lead where they were considered to have a valid voice or energy to offer; in the classroom, though, schools were reactive. Good schools reacted positively; less responsive schools gathered under their shields, a metal tortoise to repel invaders.



In today’s international schools, our approach has to be different. In our context, with highly motivated, interested parents who have a strong emotional connection to their children’s education, we fail our children and community if we think of our parents as partners with no more to offer than playground equipment, moral support, applause and contributions to the never-ending debates about school food and uniforms. We have to build a culture of genuine engagement and ownership, offering parents the chance to share in the leadership of our curriculum, our teaching and learning, our broader curriculum, and our identity.

At Harrow Shanghai, just seven years old, we had solid foundations on which we could build. Our founding families are proud that they were here at the start of the life of the school, and we have always been a warm place with an inclusive culture. Our location, on the outskirts of the city with little local high-quality housing or community facilities (and no boarding), means that parents have to make an active, considered decision to join us, often choosing our school above more obvious destinations, many of which will have been recommended by others in their social circle. There is a desire for the school to succeed, and a genuine connection with the staff here. Pupil retention is very good; attendance at pupil events, parent information sessions and open classrooms is excellent. We have also, unlike most schools for foreign passport holders in Shanghai, always had a population weighted heavily towards children from ethnically Chinese families. I think this has helped cohesion, given the school a chance to reflect on its identity, and protected it from some of the Covid-generated convulsions experienced by others in our sector.



**We have used these foundations to begin to build a culture of parent leadership. We started with some simple principles:**

We want our parents to know as much as possible about what's happening at school

Parents want to be partners in the school's journey: we are always positive, and we are always looking to improve, and parents want to help us. So we also don't pretend to be something we're not.

Pupils do better if their parents know more

Openness and transparency matter



**From our principles follow some simple actions. Some are familiar to most good schools; others are not:**

Parent Representative meetings have continued, attended by the Head periodically, and the focus has been on learning as well as organisational matters

We have broadened the range of PPPs (parent information sessions, of which there are around 100 over the course of the school year) to include more teachers talking about a range of topics, many of which explain teaching and learning strategies or approaches

We use WeCom, which is essentially a school-managed version of WeChat. This year, we removed a number of controls, increasing the number of groups and making most groups two-way, enabling parents to initiate online 'chat' conversations directly with teachers, and encouraging them to do so

We set up a Head Master WeCom group, as well as other large, phase groups, ensuring parents could ask questions and respond to information openly, their questions and views shared by other parents. The Head uses this periodically to invite ideas from parents. All school leaders and teachers can be contacted directly from WeCom

The weekly newsletter now features a chatty, discursive message from the Head as well as the phase heads, inviting parents into the discussion

We run Parent Forums to consult on our School Development Plan (SDP)

We run Head Master Brunches to consult on progress on a range of topics

We publish our SDP, translated, to parents and ask for feedback

**This coming year, we are taking things a step further:**



In April, May and June, we will be holding Parent Planning sessions with teachers and other staff on a range of subjects: for example, the Year 5 team will consult with existing Year 4 and 5 parents about aspects of Mathematics in the current curriculum, and how we can develop our approach next year. We will run between 15 and 20 of these sessions across the school.



We will be developing our Parent Partner and Executive Parent Partner scheme, which will recognise those parents who take an active role in the development of the school.

There will be more initiatives and more ideas as we move through the year. The key, though, is our central philosophy, supported by a developing understanding of how to communicate this. We want parents to feel that they own the school. Pupils too, of course. And staff. And parents as well. We do this by saying: you are the experts too. Our job, as teachers have come to understand over the years, is to educate the child, our specialist knowledge a means by which we do this. It is not to 'deliver' our subject or subjects. Our parents therefore have expertise that we need; collectively, they have expertise and wisdom that supports the whole school community in all that we do.

Just about every school will acknowledge this. It's just that we need to work harder to develop the mechanisms and the programmes to ensure that parents feel that they, too, are partners, owning the school. And that they too are leaders of the school.

A final word has to be about communication. Schools are traditionally very good at delivering instructions and information, often adding a layer of unnecessary security by cloaking all we do in formal language designed to convey our distance, to formalise our difference. "If you can't talk our language, you don't really have the right to engage at our level." It's a form of exclusion the British seem to relish.

Parents will only feel that they are owners and leaders if they are pulled into the conversation in an inclusive way. We are open in our communications. We use 'we' all the time. We avoid using passive constructions in sentence, as these tend to close off debate and imply that a choice of approach was written in the stars before the first paintings appeared on cave walls. We are informal and (appropriately) personal, closing the gap as much as we are able within our context. We never say 'but', preferring 'and'. And we are visible, present and responsive. In other words, we need to have the structures and the mechanisms in place; and we need to have open minds, open words and open eyes to pull our parents to us properly, to lead with them, giving them the ownership that will make a difference to our pupils.







## DEVELOPING EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS THROUGH THE MIDDLE LEADERS PROGRAMME

## BEATING HEART OF EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

At Harrow Shanghai, we have relaunched our Middle Leaders Programme this year explicitly to grow and nurture the culture of Middle Leadership we have as a school. Bourdieu writes of 'institutional habitus' as a way of defining the rules, expectations and broader ethos of a community, and we are working with our Middle Leaders to develop these routines and ways of working, demonstrating strong responsive leadership at all levels of the school. This is very much in collaboration with our Senior Team.

More broadly, I was recently struck by this comment in Garmston and Wellman's 2008 book *The Adaptive Schools*, "The patterns of adult interaction in a school strongly influence the climate and instructional outcomes for students". I believe developing and nurturing a more collaborative culture of school leadership, will in turn have a high level of impact on student learning as well as pastoral care (vis-à-vis Hattie's emphasis on Collective Teacher Efficacy), and improve ways in which our students both learn and interact throughout the school. In this sense, we expect our staff to live and breathe the same values as our students. Courage, Humility, Fellowship and Honour represent our school's powerful statement of intent and are a cornerstone of our community in terms of ways in which we expect students and adults throughout our community to interact. We aim to develop authentic leaders who can understand their strengths and weakness, alongside those of their teams, and create a culture where they feel able to grow through honest and critical reflection.



Certainly, developing a culture where leaders feel they have the autonomy to work creatively with their teams, and lead within their areas is a key area if Middle Leadership is to be the 'Beating Heart of Educational Transformation' in the words of Andy Hargreaves. Leaders must feel they have the freedom to challenge educational myths and ineffective systems and processes to improve the quality of student learning and wellbeing in our schools. In this sense, at the heart of our approaches to leadership must be empowering our staff with

**“ I believe developing and nurturing a more collaborative culture of school leadership, will in turn have a high level of impact on student learning as well as pastoral care, and improve ways in which our students both learn and interact throughout the school. ”**



*“Courage, Humility, Fellowship and Honour represent a powerful statement of intent as a Harrow School.”*

**SIMON PROBERT**  
DEPUTY HEAD  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, SHANGHAI



purpose and passion, to drive expectations and standards in the areas in which they are working. The latter should come easier to educationalists, Fullan's notion of 'moral purpose' underpinning why we do what we do, it also being critical that we can find also ways to empower our Middle Leadership team to ensure they have a sense of purpose and drive, aligned with the strategic direction of the school.

In order to do this, as well as working with all our own staff to develop a school culture where they feel free to experiment, innovate, take risks (and on occasion fail), we have given our Middle Leaders a key role in leading our professional learning communities. These are professional learning groups leading and aligned with our School Development Plan which aim to carry out impactful research on a given area (such as literacy or biculturalism) with the aim of reflecting on areas of strength and how we can create consistent cultures of learning. In turn through these groups, we aim to develop future directions for the school, and lead on areas of change with impact. Cross disciplinary (as well as cross-phase) dialogue is a key area of these groups, their success being measured through the impact we expect them to have on our curriculum.

In our first Middle Leadership Session we reflected on our leadership journeys thus far from both a middle and senior leadership perspective (in the words of TS Eliot 'the end is where we start from'). This then fed into discussions around the costs and benefits of leadership, and the balance of qualifications relative to experience. We then focused on ways we hoped to develop on an individual level as leaders this year, this fitting into our middle leadership appraisal framework which is based around the AISL leadership competencies. This will be followed up by sessions on varied topics, such as leading transformational change, leading teaching and learning, and more practical areas such as time management and active listening.



## A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE OF STUDENT AND TEACHER GROWTH

A culture of coaching is also linked to ways in which we are working with our Middle Leaders. In a future session we will be considering ways we can embed the principles of coaching in interactions between leaders and staff in their teams, with the aim of growing the capacity of our academic staff, and also ensuring that the twin principles of empathy and reflection underpin the culture of leadership we are developing as a school. Emotionally Intelligent leaders have a high degree of self-awareness and are responsive to the strengths and weaknesses of their teams, and developing the capacity of our staff to understand how to motivate and get the best out of their teams is a key part of our approach.

In sum, through a multi-faceted approach we learn how to grow and develop organically our leadership team, leveraging their capacity to have an impact on our school community. We have defined ourselves regarding our wider CPD programme as 'a learning community which believes in a collaborative culture of student and teacher growth and development'. Ways in which we develop and grow the capacity of our Leadership Team at all levels are a key element of this programme, and moving forward we hope our approaches to growing the capacity and competencies of this team will have an impact on student outcomes at all levels of the school.





# INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION



“By embracing innovation, educators can equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.”

**JADE HONEY**  
HEAD OF LOWER SCHOOL CURRICULUM  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, HENGQIN

In the ever-evolving landscape of education in the 21st century, innovative leadership practices play a crucial role in shaping the learning experience for our students (Elkington & Booysen, 2015). As a teacher at Harrow Hengqin, where the focus is on nurturing young learners with English as a second language, it becomes paramount to adopt leadership strategies that align with the dynamic needs of the educational environment.

One key innovative leadership practice is fostering a culture of adaptability. In a world that is constantly changing, the ability to adapt becomes a valuable skill for both educators and students. Creating an environment that encourages flexibility and resilience can empower students to navigate challenges with confidence. This could involve incorporating project-based learning, where students engage in real-world problem-solving, allowing them to apply their language skills in practical scenarios. By embracing adaptability, students not only enhance their language proficiency but also develop essential life skills for the future.

Another crucial aspect of innovative leadership in education is the integration of technology. In a globalised world, technology serves as a bridge connecting students to a vast array of information and resources. Incorporating digital tools into the curriculum can enhance language learning experiences. This might include interactive language learning apps, virtual collaborations with students from other parts of the world, or even utilising AI-based language learning platforms. Such technological integrations not only make the learning process more engaging but also prepare students for the digital demands of the 21st century.

In the context of the grading system at Harrow Hengqin, it is essential to tailor innovative leadership practices to meet the diverse needs of students at different proficiency levels. For those at lower proficiency levels, personalised learning plans can be implemented to provide targeted support. This might involve additional language workshops, one-on-one tutoring sessions during Co-Curriculum Activities/Super-Curriculum Activities times, or interactive multimedia resources designed to cater to diverse learning styles. For students with higher proficiency, the emphasis could shift towards advanced language projects, collaborative research endeavours, and opportunities for mentorship.

“Equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need in a rapidly changing world.”



## ADAPTABILITY

In a world that is constantly changing, the ability to adapt becomes a valuable skill for both educators and students.



## TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

In a globalised world, technology serves as a bridge connecting students to a vast array of information and resources.



## PERSONALISED LEARNING

It is essential to tailor innovative leadership practices to meet the diverse needs of students at different proficiency levels.



## COLLABORATION

Creating a collaborative learning community not only fosters a sense of belonging but also enhances the overall educational experience.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Clear and transparent communication channels between teachers, students, and parents can significantly contribute to the success of language learning.

Collaboration is another key element of innovative leadership. Creating a collaborative learning community not only fosters a sense of belonging but also enhances the overall educational experience. Facilitating collaborative projects within the class and even across different grades can create a supportive ecosystem. This approach not only builds language proficiency through communication but also instils teamwork, fellowship and interpersonal skills, essential for success in the 21st century.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, effective communication is at the heart of innovative leadership practices. Clear and transparent communication channels between teachers, students, and parents can significantly contribute to the success of language learning. Regular updates on student progress, parent-teacher conferences, and even using digital platforms for instant communication can strengthen the educational partnership. By involving parents in our learning journey, there is a greater likelihood of students receiving consistent support both at school and at home.

In conclusion, innovative leadership practices for 21st-century education should revolve around adaptability, technology integration, personalised learning, collaboration, and effective communication. By embracing innovation, educators can equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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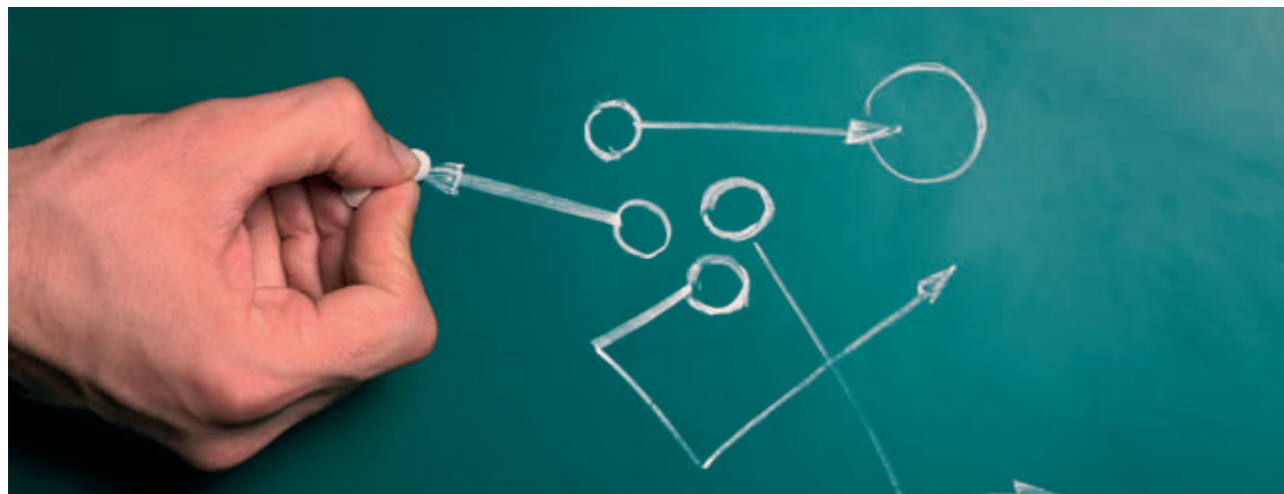
“A balanced coaching approach establishes appropriate levels of challenge and support.”

**ADAM PROBERT**  
DIRECTOR OF DATA AND DEVELOPMENT  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, BEIJING

## KEY COACHING ELEMENTS TO DEVELOPING POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

I have recently moved into a coaching role with my local rugby team, The Beijing Devils. After playing the sport for thirty years, this transition should be easy right? Well, not quite so. Coaching a team is far different to playing in one, but maybe what has surprised me more, is the way in which the skills required to coach a sports team and coaching a team in an educational context transfer from one to the other. This short piece aims to lightly touch on some of the key aspects of a rugby match, whilst sharing some serious thoughts on how to deliver effective coaching strategies and sustain positive leadership.

**“RUGBY IS A GAME ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK AND TRUST, AND IT’S NOT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL.” RICHIE MCCA**



### UNDERSTANDING



MUTUAL TRUST



OPEN COMMUNICATION

## THE SCRUM: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

On the rugby pitch, the scrum is where the team unites, combines strengths, and faces challenges head-on. To facilitate a team’s unity, an effective coach will build a strong foundation through mutual trust, understanding and open communication. We build connections, warmth and trust when we offer support; Then we can offer the challenge (Starr, 2016).

In schools, effective, regular team meetings should ensure a united front where insights are shared, goals are aligned, and challenges are faced collectively. One example of building trust at Harrow Beijing is the annual Away Day, where Upper School Heads of Department come together with the Senior Leadership Team to reflect and share challenges from the year. A balanced coaching approach establishes appropriate levels of challenge and support, then, collectively, everyone can draw upon strengths and experiences to set goals and agreed strategies to continue to drive the school forward the following year – laying the foundations.

For the Coach, it is important to know **why** you are coaching in situations like this – make sure the conversation is centred around **that** reason – avoid solving the wrong problem.



**Tip: Read *The Coaching Habit ‘The Focus Question’* (Stanier, 2016)**






## THE LINE OUT: AIMING HIGH AND ELEVATING PERFORMANCE

***“THE LINE OUT IS NOT JUST JUMPING AND CATCHING, IT’S ABOUT PRECISION AND TIMING.” - MARTIN JOHNSON***

This area of the game is about precision, strategy and elevating team mates to achieve the desired outcome. It is impossible to be successful if only one person decides the strategy. There needs to be multiple leaders within the team. Effective leadership through coaching techniques should produce more leaders, not followers (Peters, 2018). The principle here is setting clear objectives, goals, and using effective strategies to elevate an individual’s performance, often most successfully achieved when “beginning with the end in mind” (Covey, 1989).

In schools, one cannot just become better by one’s self. Decisions need to be made as a result of strategy and joined up thinking. A good leader will support a colleague in rising to the challenge by helping them set ambitious, yet achievable goals. At Harrow Beijing, we have encouraged all Upper School staff to conduct a Skills Audit, identifying areas in need of development, which in turn, leads to ‘Facilitating’ coaching-style conversations, whereby individuals are encouraged to think in detail about the issue, and then make a decision that they will take ownership of. This style is far preferable to adopting a Persuading, Telling, or Avoiding style of coaching. Holding reviews of progress towards goals throughout the year enables feedback, customization on plans, regaining/maintaining clarity, and visualising trajectory for the remainder of the year.

For the coach, a non-directive style will always be more desirable, but it is often the most difficult to do. It is also important to note, that sometimes, a more directive style is necessary if the leader feels there is a risk that a detrimental decision will be made, which could be harmful to the individual and/or the students.

 **Tip: Compare and contrast Egan’s ‘Skilled Helper Model’, Whitmore’s ‘Coaching for Performance’, the GROW, CLEAR, OSCAR, and CIGAR models to see where the cross-overs and unique nuances can support coaching conversations in various scenarios.**




## THE TRY: CELEBRATING MILESTONES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

***EVERY TRY YOU SCORE IS A TESTAMENT TO THE TEAMWORK AND EFFORT PUT IN BY EVERYONE...IT’S THE TEAM’S SUCCESS.” - SHANE WILLIAMS***

The ultimate reward resulting from teamwork, strategy, and effort is when a player crosses the white line to score a try. Rarely, however, do they get there all by themselves. The fact that so many of a player’s teammates will play a part in the build-up is why the elation felt when scoring a try, is shared by everyone from the players, the coaching staff, and the supporters. So, as with celebrating a try in rugby, it is important for leaders in schools to champion and lead the celebrations of the successes of colleagues, no matter how big or small.

At Harrow Beijing, we have introduced “Item 1” into every Upper School meeting that takes place, which means that regardless of the nature of the meeting, be it at Senior level, Departmental, or Pastoral, the first thing that happens is that we go around the table and ask everyone to share anything that has had a positive impact on Teaching and Learning that week, whether in their own classroom, or something observed in a colleague’s classroom. We also highlight ‘House Point Heroes’ and ‘Coach of the Week’ in every Friday Briefing to recognise and acknowledge the amazing efforts of our staff.

By acknowledging the practice and contributions of staff, actions become repeated and replicated, and as Aristotle said **“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit”**.

 **Tip: Read *The One Minute Manager* by Ken Blanchard where the central theme is about the impact of catching people doing things right, and praising them, and how this positive reinforcement and recognition has had a significant impact on leadership practice since its publication, and still remains a component of coaching approaches.**




## THE FULL-TIME WHISTLE: REFLECTION AND FORWARD PLANNING

*"IN RUGBY, AS IN LIFE, YOU LOOK FORWARD, PLAN AHEAD, AND PLAY WHAT'S IN FRONT OF YOU, BUT ALWAYS LEARN FROM THE BACK PLAY." - GARETH EDWARDS*

This is a time for reflection on the performance of the team, learning from mistakes, and planning to improve upon these mistakes next time. It is also about recognizing where progress has been made, and building upon that. Reflection is one of the most underused yet powerful tools for success (Carlson, 2000), which is why most schools have a robust self-evaluation cycle, so that in-depth reflection can take place and strategic planning for moving forward can take effect. The best schools will not shy away from brutally honest reflection and as Zeus and Skiffington (2002) suggest, by challenging our perceptions, we are able to identify our blind spots, thus beginning the process of identifying alternative possibilities.

At Harrow Beijing, self-reflection is part of an ongoing endeavor to ensure that we learn as a collective. One very recent example includes, conducting an audit of ICT competencies to enable sub-groups from a team of Digital Champions to be formulated and support the differing needs of colleagues across the Upper School, upskilling them and therefore, impacting the quality of planning, resourcing, and/or delivery of teaching material, thus improving the quality of learning experiences of our students.

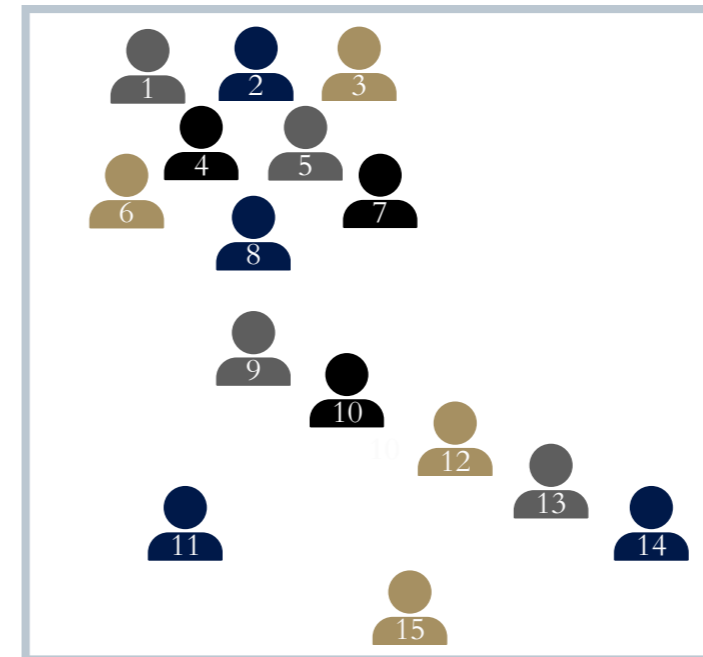


 **Tip: Read *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner* by Christopher Johns, if you think that you as a coach, or a coach could benefit from learning how to develop reflective practice skills to enhance professional development.**

With luck, this short read, by highlighting the parallels between rugby coaching and coaching at school for positive leadership development, will emphasise the universal principles of coaching and its transformative powers. So, as with my playing career, I would like to hang the boots up on this self-indulgent trope by spotlighting the following key elements of coaching, which I found to be a great place to start when building my own playbook:



## HARROW FIRST XV



1. Establish clear, measurable **goals** and **expectations**.
2. Develop a relationship of **trust** and **confidentiality**.
3. Use **active listening** to truly understand individual needs and challenges.
4. Provide timely, constructive, and specific **feedback**.
5. Encourage a **growth mindset** and continual learning.
6. Customise your coaching approach to **individual** learning styles and needs.
7. Facilitate **self-reflection** to promote self-awareness and self-regulation.
8. Champion a **strengths-based approach** to enhance confidence and performance.
9. Foster an environment of **open communication** and psychological safety.
10. **Challenge** coachees to move out of their comfort zones.
11. Utilise **questioning techniques** that provoke critical thinking.
12. Empower individuals to **take ownership** of their development and decisions.
13. **Celebrate** successes and milestones, however small they may seem.
14. Be **adaptable** and **flexible** to adjust plans as circumstances change.
15. Conduct regular reviews of progress and recalibrate goals as necessary.

### CELEBRATE SUCCESSES AND MILESTONES

*It is important for leaders in schools to champion and lead the celebrations of the successes of colleagues, no matter how big or small.*





“*Emotional Intelligence is not a fixed state, but one which is invariably adapting and morphing as a consequence of the variables that surround it.*”

**CHARLES ELLISON**  
DIRECTOR OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS  
ASIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIMITED

## GETTING TO THE HEART OF IT THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE WITHIN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP.

Evidence on the impact leadership in schools brings about in terms of the outcomes for pupils is clear, unequivocal and well-proven. Effective leaders shape success. How they do this does not fit a standard formula. Traditional attributes such as strategic acumen, decisiveness, an ability to employ and understand objective assessment mechanisms remain important; however, the societies in which school communities exist continue to become more complicated and school environments have increasingly become places where interpersonal relationships between stakeholders are multidimensional and where individuals are more aware of their own personal and collective desires and needs. Thus, to be highly effective, school leaders of today must benefit from strongly nuanced emotional intelligence if they are to maximise the impact of their interactions. Emotional intelligence (EI) is, of course, multi-faceted and given it is challenging to quantifiably measure, often underestimated.



### DEFINING AND RECOGNISING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence consists of a wide range of interconnected skills that enable school leaders to recognise, understand, manage and effectively direct their own emotions and those of the many stakeholders they lead. Such EI skills nurture positive and supportive school cultures where people feel they belong, are understood and valued, and are cared for. Leaders with high EI perceive the emotional needs of students, staff and parents very adeptly and naturally, promoting their ability to address issues and opportunities and to influence the general school environment promptly, positively and empathetically. This allows leaders to reduce institutional conflicts and stress and to foster the cultural conditions in which people learn, feel motivated and rewarded, and ultimately thrive.

### SELF AWARENESS

The starting point for high levels of EI in school leaders is often defined by their own self awareness and ability to self regulate. It stands to reason that if leaders are to be effective in managing the emotions of others, they must first understand and manage their own emotions – their triggers, strengths, weaknesses and inclinations. Doing so helps to build consistency of approach, dependability, resilience and authenticity, all of which have positive effects on the general culture of the school and act as models of behaviour for others.

### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Leaders with high EI are effective communicators. They are aware of their communication styles and of the need to connect with their audiences. They can adapt delivery and content in ‘real time’ to be alongside those with whom they are communicating and will tailor their communication strategies for different individuals and groups based on a whole range of pertinent variables

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The occurrence of conflicts is a very normal aspect of community existence. Diverse needs within a fast-paced and demanding environment that is often characterised by both high expectations and change can be unsettling and testing for many. Leaders with strong EI are well-equipped to handle potential and real conflicts, and threats to emotional well-being constructively. Their actions are founded on the principle that empathy is the bridge to understanding and to positive action. They understand the emotions and perspectives of those involved and often encourage open dialogue, working towards acceptable resolution for all involved. The strength of relationships that leaders with high EI enjoy are able to create fosters a sense of trust which is pivotal to the negotiation of an outcome and path that is acceptable to all parties within an often diverse community of individuals.

Such relationships also ensure a high degree of what is termed ‘discretionary effort’ from stakeholders who feel part of a team and something ‘bigger than themselves’. Teacher morale and professional growth directly influence outcomes for pupils. The supportive and rewarding work environment generated by leaders with strong EI ensures that the positive influence of teachers is maximized leading to high levels of student well-being and academic success.

### CHALLENGES TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE

Leadership in schools is often challenging and complex. Cultivating and maintaining an environment founded upon strong levels of EI (from self and others) and well-tended relationships is demanding, and often exhausting. To be consistently effective, school leaders must give conscious direction to their own well-being whilst building into the functioning of the school opportunities to reflect upon the impact an atmosphere where EI is centrally important is bringing about. All stakeholders must be given a voice on this, in addition to opportunities to develop their own EI and that of others. EI is not a fixed state, but one which is invariably adapting and morphing as a consequence of the variables that surround it. As we look to the future of education and the increasing involvements of artificial intelligence, it is clear that human EI will become more crucial still in forming and sustaining high performing cultures in schools. We must place EI at the very heart of leadership development, constantly acknowledging its criticality and centrality in nurturing the environments within which our pupils, their parents and our colleagues will thrive, both as individuals and as a society of people who share in a common purpose.





## ACTION RESEARCH CHANGING THE CULTURE

“Laying the groundwork for a culture of change requires developing visible leaders of learning who understand their pivotal role in improving school and student performance and model their own learning.”

**DANIEL IRVINE**  
HEAD OF UPPER SCHOOL  
AISL HARROW SCHOOL, CHONGQING



### WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Action research is a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning within a school community. By engaging in a systematic process of inquiry, reflection, and action, teachers can identify areas for improvement, develop and test interventions, and evaluate their impact on student outcomes. Action research can also foster collaboration, innovation, and professional growth, as teachers work together to solve problems and share their learning. According to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), “Action research is a process of systematic inquiry that seeks to improve educational practice through the analysis of data and the development of practical solutions to identified problems.” The University of Sussex defines it as a collaborative process that involves teachers, researchers, and other stakeholders working together to identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for change.”

### CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND DIRECTION A SCHOOL VISION CREATED & OWNED BY ALL

#### MAKING DIFFERENCES A TABLE OF LEARNING Shulman, L.S. (2002)

ENGAGEMENT & MOTIVATION

KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING

PERFORMANCE & ACTION

REFLECTION & CRITIQUE

JUDGEMENT & DESIGN

COMMITMENT & IDENTITY

Shulman's (2002) table of learning can be used to illustrate the learning phases that teachers may go through in their action research:

Fullan (2007) emphasised the critical role that teachers play in driving educational change; “educational change depends on what teachers do and think it's as simple and as complex as that.” Fullan's quote suggests that teachers are the key drivers of change in education, and that their actions and beliefs are essential to the success of any educational reform effort. This quote highlights the importance of empowering teachers to take ownership of their professional development and to engage in ongoing learning and reflection.



CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND DIRECTION - A SCHOOL VISION CREATED AND OWNED BY ALL



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is an essential component of Action Research. It involves providing teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to implement change. This can be achieved through regular professional development opportunities, such as weekly academic meetings, teacher learning communities, external professional development opportunities, peer-to-peer learning, collaborative developmental observations and lesson study. By building capacity, teachers are better equipped to identify problems, develop solutions, and implement change. Collective intelligence involves harnessing the collective knowledge and expertise of teachers to solve problems and improve teaching practices. By working together, teachers can share ideas, provide feedback, and support each other in the process of inquiry and reflection.

Collaborative co-construction of knowledge is also critical to the success of Action Research. It involves engaging teachers in the process of inquiry and reflection and empowering them to take ownership of their learning. By involving teachers in the process of change, they are more likely to be invested in the outcomes and committed to implementing the solutions. At Harrow Chongqing, collaborative developmental observations & lesson study focus on the action research being carried out to support the development of a collective culture. This culture of change also involves enhancing teacher knowledge and practical skills, identifying successful classroom implementation through developmental observations based on equal participation, and allowing individuals to make their own meaning. Creating a culture of change is not just about structural changes, but also about commitment and identity.



**AN IDENTITY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**ACTION RESEARCH IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING WITHIN A SCHOOL COMMUNITY.**

*By engaging in a systematic process of inquiry, reflection, and action, teachers can identify areas for improvement, develop and test interventions, and evaluate their impact on student outcomes.*

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of educational change, recognising that it is not a simple or straightforward process. Rather, it requires a deep understanding of the complex systems and structures that shape education, as well as a willingness to engage in ongoing experimentation and adaptation. This underscores the importance of teacher agency and collaboration in driving educational change and serves as a reminder of the critical role that teachers play in shaping the future of education.



**CREATING A CULTURE OF CHANGE**

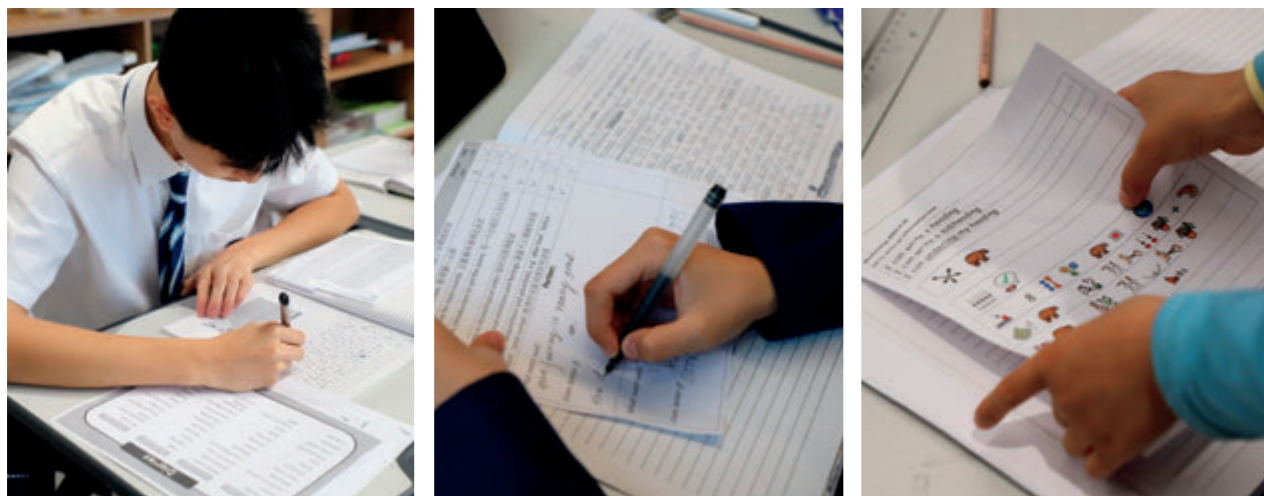
## THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Laying the groundwork for a culture of change requires developing visible leaders of learning who understand their pivotal role in improving school and student performance and model their own learning. Their focus is on making a difference in student learning by awakening teachers' intrinsic commitment and a sense of moral purpose, mobilizing many people to tackle tough problems, and aligning resources with identified priorities. This must be reinforced with evidence-based monitoring of impact and tracking of changes.

Harrow Chongqing began its culture of action research in 2021, after opening in 2020, with the introduction of 'developmental targets' on performance management forms. In 2021, we developed teacher chosen targets for development aligned to school development needs, which would form the basis of marketplace sharing and developmental lesson observations throughout the year, as well as allowing for regular conversations, feedback and coaching with school leaders. We reinforced this collaborative culture in January INSET of 2022 with all staff revisiting, recreating, and redrafting the school vision, ultimately producing a collaboratively created, teacher owned school vision.







**EVIDENCE BASED, STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING**

## EMBEDDING CHANGE IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Dylan William and Siobhán Leahy (2014) discuss how it takes time for changes in practice to be lasting, and for changes in practice to be integrated into a teacher's existing routines. They note that a minimum period of four weeks is necessary for teachers to plan and carry out a new idea in their classrooms. Action research 'cycles' have been a key part of this; with a termly focus on a wide area, identified from the school Strategic Development Plan, which teachers then pursue a sub part of. This gives teachers time to experiment, learn from successes and challenges, tweak their ideas, and try again. For example, a focus on 'assessment' has included self and peer assessment, Assessment For Learning (AfL), Bilingual/English as an Additional Language (EAL) friendly assessment development and development of data analysis through trialing various standardised assessments. These all went through many distinct stages and trials to find a successful model. Staff choose an area of focus within this for their developmental target for the year and this target becomes the focus of subsequent developmental observations. This creates a safe environment, with time to innovate, practice and experiment.

Twice yearly, we have a 'Marketplace sharing' attended by Senior Leadership Team (SLT) where teachers share resources, classroom video and photos, student work and data to illustrate what they have been experimenting with. There are also peer observations, as well as progress data meetings and presentations throughout the year. This is a chance to celebrate the impact of action research and the successes evident in the data, along with other evidence, such as student ownership of learning through self and peer assessment or progress in extended writing portfolios, as well as an opportunity to discuss and plan next steps together. The importance of celebrating and recognising successes and challenges in teachers' action research over the year is paramount to creating a safe culture of experimentation in teaching and learning and creating a foundation for a successful action research culture.



**IN SCHOOLS, ONE CANNOT JUST BECOME BETTER BY ONE'S SELF.**

Decisions need to be made as a result of strategy and joined up thinking. A good leader will support a colleague in rising to the challenge by helping them set ambitious, yet achievable goals.





## A GLOBAL LEARNING PLATFORM

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