

To the Education Committee's inquiry on the Purpose and Quality of Education in England

Executive summary

- The Kyra Teaching School Alliance is an alliance of 41 nursery, infant, junior and primary schools across Lincolnshire, led by Lincoln Mount Street Academy Teaching School, which is part of CfBT Schools Trust.
- The alliance has a strong ethos built on our vision of being 'ambitious for children', which is at the heart of all we do.
- Collaboration is a cornerstone of Kyra's work and this is a key skill that we also work hard to develop in the children and young people we serve.
- The purpose of education in England should be two-fold – both to embed strong academic skills in core subjects and to ensure that children and young people grow up to be well-rounded, responsible global citizens.
- Our education system should promote curiosity, resilience, wellbeing (both physical and emotional) and a love of learning that lasts throughout life.
- Education should ensure more than just equality of opportunity, it should be about equity, which might at times mean doing more for some pupils than others.
- The vital importance of early years education should not be underestimated.
- Whilst there needs to be strong accountability, our system needs to be able to measure more than just academic skills, but also the softer skills that will enable children and young people to thrive in the next stage of their education and in the world of work, as well as in their day to day relationships.
- Measures should look at academic achievement, characteristics, progress, equality and equity, and well-being.
- Our recommendations to the Committee are to:
 - Start and intervene early
 - Invest in support for parents and families
 - Recruit, develop and retain effective teachers and high quality leaders across the system

Introduction

1. The Kyra Teaching School Alliance is an alliance of 41 nursery, infant, junior and primary schools across Lincolnshire, led by Lincoln Mount Street Academy Teaching School, which is part of CfBT Schools Trust.
2. Lincoln Mount Street was the first Teaching School to be designated in Lincolnshire. The alliance was established in 2012. Around one quarter of Kyra schools are academies and the rest are maintained schools. The schools within the alliance work together to ensure that all can contribute to the aims of the alliance and in turn are able to collaborate locally to continuously improve their practice and outcomes for children.
3. The alliance has a strong ethos built on our vision of being 'ambitious for children', which is at the heart of all we do, both in terms of our pupils' education as well as the development and learning opportunities we provide for the teachers, teaching assistants and all staff across the

alliance. It is this ethos which has determined our action to submit evidence to this inquiry – we are passionate about providing a high quality education for all the children in our schools.

4. Kyra's vision is "*We will harness our collective professionalism, expertise, and moral purpose, to ensure no one is left behind, and every school and individual in our partnership thrives – to the benefit of all children.*"
5. We firmly believe in the vision of a school-led system and are proud to be contributing to it through our work to train and develop the next generation of teachers and school leaders; providing support to other schools; and by undertaking research activities to better understand the impact of different approaches to teaching and learning.
6. What we refer to as our Kyra 'DNA', comprises the following 'promises' that we have made to each other within the Kyra Alliance:

Ambitious for children: always setting the bar high, even if it makes us feel uncomfortable, because by working together anything is possible.

A learning community: constantly understanding our needs and identifying best practice and research to generate a professional learning community. We are not afraid of asking for help, nor are we reserved in offering support and expertise wherever we can.

Builders of social capital: starting with the premise: 'what can we give?' rather than 'what can we get?' generates a rich community of mutual support and professional generosity.

Quality & impact: holding ourselves to account with clear aims and targets that clearly link to children's outcomes. As contributors, we will be open to the scrutiny of others, knowing that accountability & review is key to the continued success of any learning community.

Celebrating diversity: respecting the diversity of schools and members across our alliance. Seeing this as a strength whilst ensuring no one is excluded or left behind.

Moral Purpose: committed to the success of children and adults in all of our schools. Our opportunity is to achieve something truly transformational that translates into a better education system for all. We celebrate the successes of our partners as we would our own.

7. As a professional learning community, the adults in all Kyra schools model the learning that is expected of our pupils. We welcome feedback, collaborate on our learning and research, undertake peer review as part of our support package to schools, and also operate a test and learn environment where staff feel supported in testing innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Our teaching and learning and research activities are firmly grounded in the latest evidence from academic and government research. At Kyra, we have been impressed by the work of two academics in particular: Professor John Hattie for his seminal work on 'visible learning'¹; and Professor David Hargreaves for his excellent and innovative work on joint practice development² and peer review³.

What the purpose of education for children of all ages in England should be

8. The purpose of education in England should, in broad terms, be two-fold. It should serve to both embed strong academic skills in the core subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, science, creativity and technological skills; and to ensure that children and young people grow up to be well-rounded, responsible global citizens who can communicate effectively, build positive relationships and contribute to society. In this way, education has a key role in creating and

¹ <http://visible-learning.org/john-hattie/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leading-a-self-improving-school-system>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-self-improving-school-system-towards-maturity>

promoting the wellbeing of the nation as a whole and more broadly the wider world. The education system should therefore, through our schools, be the training ground for life, not just the training ground for the world of work. Education has the additional purpose of giving children aspiration, and enabling them to see they have choices about the future (life without limits) and then providing them with the skills and resources to access whatever route they want to take for their future. Our education system also needs to 'future proof' our children and young people, for a world of work that is not yet certain, and in doing so provide them with the skills of flexibility, innovation and problem-solving.

9. Our education system should promote curiosity, resilience, wellbeing (both physical and emotional) and a love of learning that lasts throughout life. When we look at the problems in society today, we need to think about how our education system prepares our children and young people to live in such a world and to have the resilience, tolerance and confidence to work to change things for the better. This means pupils learning about ecological concerns and societal/political concerns, as well as gaining strong academic skills in the core subjects.
10. The early years and primary education should not only prepare children for the next stage in their education, but should also be forming the foundations for their role as confident, well-rounded members of society. Secondary education should prepare pupils for further and higher education, as well as giving them ambition and aspiration and both the knowledge and soft skills that will enable them to thrive in the world of work. Skills such as communication, interpersonal skills and building positive relationships need to be developed from early childhood onwards. The education system should systematically help our pupils to learn and develop all the skills they will need as human beings, members of our society and global citizens.
11. Kyra Children's Council is a unique collaboration of children from across the alliance, who work together and meet regularly to help improve and celebrate the rich variety of experiences in our schools. Through their membership of the Council, pupils not only have a chance to represent their respective schools and learn about what other schools are doing, they also develop their communication, interpersonal and leadership skills, which will be so vital as they continue their educational journey.
12. Education should be the ultimate leveller, where pupils are not further disadvantaged by the system. This is about more than equality of opportunity but is also about equity, which might sometimes mean doing more for some children than others, to ensure they are able to achieve their potential.
13. The vital importance of early years education should not be underestimated. At Kyra we believe passionately in providing a firm foundation for our pupils through our high quality early years provision. The UNICEF State of the World's Children report for 2001 states that *'for a government that wants to improve the lot of its people, investing in the first years of life is the best money it can spend. But tragically, both for children and for nations, these are the years that receive the least attention.'* In response to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), Kyra took the opportunity to test a regional hub model for early years, which could bring together all types of providers and develop practitioner led networks, provide peer support and challenge, and CPD opportunities. It also enabled working with other partnerships, such as Bishop Grosseteste University and the Lincolnshire Birth to Five Service. Phase 1 of the regional hub model used triads of providers of the same organisational type to take part in the research on the use of a print-rich environment around the outside sand area, in order to enhance (particularly boys') learning; and phase 2 used cross organisational triads which evaluated how children with English as an Additional Language made relationships with their peers and how this impacted on acquisition of English. Currently, more than 70 early years settings are working as

triads throughout Lincolnshire, including three triads of childminders. Areas of work include EAL, parental involvement, storytelling, physical development and early communication.



What measures should be used to evaluate the quality of education against this purpose

14. Whilst there needs to be strong accountability in the education system and therefore some measure of the effectiveness of schools at doing what is being asked of them, the current Ofsted grading system can be pervasive and divisive. It deals in the absolutes of outcomes for children, in terms of their academic 'success', and does not allow the system to measure the achievement of children and young people in terms of the softer skills we have highlighted above. These skills we believe are just as important as core academic achievement. However, the new inspection framework does give schools the opportunity to discuss impact; and the engagement of serving headteachers as Ofsted inspectors is a positive development.
15. Schools should be about more than key stage measures, they should be about values and ethos and providing parents and pupils with the learning environment that is most appropriate to their context. To a certain extent, a simple measure of whether a school is 'effective/compliant' or 'not yet effective/not yet compliant' should be all that is needed at a national level. This is enough to tell parents whether a school is doing what it's supposed to do and thereafter their decision about where to send their child will be very much based on their sense of the school environment and its values. Parental engagement is a particularly important issue, especially for schools in areas of high deprivation or where the majority of their pupils have English as an additional language; so some way of measuring parental engagement would be helpful. There is not a single model of what a good or outstanding school looks like, neither is there a single model of what a good teacher or school leader looks like; these will vary according to context and the needs of the local community. This is especially relevant in the current climate of rapid growth in the numbers of academies and multi-academy trusts, where schools have more control over their curriculum and how they respond to education policy.
16. Schools also need to be able to spot talent amongst their pupils - including talents which are not measured by the current accountability mechanisms. Some pupils may show themselves to be talented at particular sports, or be highly creative, or be great verbal communicators and leaders, but will struggle to communicate in the written word, such that this talent is unable to be translated into a measurable skill. The current primary curriculum is so heavily weighted towards English and mathematics that we feel that opportunities for children with other skills to thrive are being marginalised.
17. There should be a range of measures in place in order to evaluate the quality of the education system we are describing here:
 - a. **Academic measures** – These should be focused on the ability of pupils to use and apply their technical knowledge across the core subjects, as well as in their other chosen areas of learning. These skills will in turn help to create and promote wellbeing by opening up different pathways to further and higher education and to employment.
 - b. **Character measures** – These would look at issues such as how happy and motivated a child or young person is, how well they deal with challenge and failure and how resilient they are. These characteristics are measured in the early years through the 'characteristics of effective learning' but they are not currently followed up as children progress through school. One of the new baseline assessments being trialled by primary schools (EExBA – developed by Huddersfield University⁴) uses the Leuven scale of

⁴ <http://earlyexcellence.com/eexba/>

emotional wellbeing and involvement to gauge readiness to learn – this could potentially be used at different school stages.

- c. **Progress measures** – There should be a measure of children’s progress through school, with an emphasis on progress from starting points, with appropriate contextual measures taken into account. These progress measures should be central to the accountability measures for schools. Some schools do an outstanding job in enabling their pupils to make excellent progress but struggle to be ‘outstanding’ schools because their attainment results are unlikely to be high enough. E.g. the profile of Kyra schools is such that pupil progress is likely to always be better than absolute attainment. This is not to suggest that progress measures should excuse those schools which are coasting and not doing the best for their pupils, but it should have equal standing to academic measures.
- d. **Equality and equity measures** – This is about ensuring that all children and young people have equal (and in some cases more) opportunities to develop both academically and through the softer skills of communication, leadership, etc, that will give them the confidence and self-esteem to build good relationships, both in their private and professional lives. This means ensuring that some groups of pupils (e.g. pupil premium, EAL [English as and additional language]) are well catered for in this regard. It also means understanding the reasons for the geographic variation in terms of outcomes for pupils and putting in place measures to raise the bar and close the gaps in performance across the country. The latest research by the Social Market Foundation (SMF) shows that regional inequalities in attainment are already apparent by the end of primary school⁵.
- e. **Well-being measures** – These will include short and longer term measures that are not academic in nature. Some way of measuring outcomes in PSHE would be helpful here, in order to understand whether pupils are gaining the skills they need to be well-rounded members of a global society. Measuring the development of these skills over time would again enable progress to be measured in these softer skills. Raising awareness of health and mental health and brokering access for pupils to required interventions is becoming more of a need for children and young people. We are acutely aware of this need among pupils in our Kyra schools and we have to work hard to get the support required due to financial constraints at local authority level. Character development, including giving pupils the skills to make them more resilient and confident, should also support schools’ role in preparing children and young people for both the next stage of their education and also for the work environment.

18. The overarching question here is to ask what we value most about our education system and then to ask how we measure what we value. We also need to ask for what purpose we are measuring what we already measure; and whether such measurements are politically motivated or whether they are truly in the interests of the child.

19. Another issue is how to achieve consistently good and outstanding teaching across the system. Again, this is much easier when schools work in clusters and alliances and have access to high quality peer review systems; but how do headteachers in, e.g. standalone academies know that their assessment of their teachers is accurate?

How well the current education system performs against these measures

20. In terms of how well the current education system performs against the measures outlined in paragraph 17:

⁵ <http://www.smf.co.uk/publications/educational-inequalities-in-england-and-wales/>

- a. **Academic measures** – our current education system (at school level) performs well overall against the current measures of academic achievement; and has improved over time, although it does put a lot of pressure on headteachers, teachers, parents and pupils.
 - b. **Character measures** – as discussed above, characteristics are measured in the early years but not followed up as children move through education so there is currently no way of determining the development of these traits at each stage.
 - c. **Progress measures** – measures based on progress (rather than simply attainment at different key stages) are not recognised highly enough, particularly at primary level. However, the new ‘Progress 8’ measure being introduced this year for secondary schools will measure student’s progress across eight subjects, which will include not only EBacc subjects but can also include any other approved academic or vocational qualification. We welcome this step at secondary level but would argue for a similar approach at key stage 2.
 - d. **Equality and equity measures** – one of the biggest concerns we still have is the high level of regional variability in educational outcomes. These regional differences are not being investigated thoroughly enough, e.g. we still don’t know why London schools have improved so much faster than schools in other major conurbations. The evidence suggests that the London Challenge was the core influence behind London’s sudden and rapid success but when similar approaches were rolled out in other areas (e.g. the Black Country Challenge and Greater Manchester Challenge) the effects were not always replicated. We therefore recommend more inquiry as to the reasons for continuing regional variation.
 - e. **Well-being measures** – there is currently no system in place to provide a measure of pupil well-being, happiness or their potential future contribution to society; and at Kyra we would be hesitant to suggest that these softer outcomes are measured at a national level. However, school-based surveys or community or regional surveys could have a role here.
21. The Committee cannot underestimate the impact that changes to curriculum, particularly at primary level; and assessment measures in particular, are currently having on schools. The vast number of hours spent on CPD, development of policies, systems and implementation is having a significant impact on the breadth, capacity and resource for other areas of schooling and education. Whilst we understand and welcome the Government’s drive for a school-led, self-improving education system, at Kyra we feel that the previous use of a national system for curriculum assessment made sense, in that it was easily transferable between schools and between phases, which made pupil mobility easier to deal with and therefore supported equity of provision for such mobile pupils across the system. We do not see how having myriad different attainment measures being developed across the system helps individual pupils; if anything it is having a detrimental effect of the rich provision previously on offer at primary level in particular.
 22. Although we recognise that the above curriculum and other system-wide changes will not be reversed, we feel that the system urgently needs a period of stability in order to fully embed these changes and to allow teachers and leaders to focus on delivering the best education to the children in our schools.
 23. Whilst education has never had so much publicity as it has now and there has never been so much pressure put on the system, the positive side of this is that there is now also a greater climate of involvement and opportunities for teachers and school leaders to engage with the Government and with policy development, as this call for evidence demonstrates.

Recommendations to the Education Committee

24. **Start and intervene early** – the earlier the better in terms of closing the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers. High quality early years provision is vital to the early identification of problems with communication and academic skills and to brokering the necessary interventions. We welcome the Government’s policy to open up free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds and believe that this will have a positive impact on both the academic attainment of these children as they move through school, but also on their development of the softer skills such as communication, working with others and building good relationships. We firmly believe that having a free two-year-old offer within school-based pre-school settings will have a particularly strong impact on those children who take up the places offered, and will also enable a good transition to primary school. High quality early years provision provides an excellent foundation for future learning.
25. **Invest in support for parents and families** – schools cannot be expected to take full responsibility for the successful outcomes of the children and young people in their care. Parents and carers clearly have a crucial role, in particular in supporting their children to develop the softer skills they will need to succeed. However, some parents and carers struggle to support their children in this way, often due to poor experiences they had themselves as children, so it is vital that the necessary support is available for parents and carers to access. Again, this is an area of provision that has been hit by falling local authority budgets, but it is none-the-less vital if we are to engage parents and families in the work schools are doing to provide the best outcomes for their children.
- “If parents want to give their children a gift – the best thing they can do is to teach them to love challenge, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning⁶”*
26. **Effective teachers and highest quality leaders** – if schools are to provide the standard of education we outline in this submission, then it is clear that the system must ensure it is recruiting and training the most effective teachers; and that it is developing and growing the highest quality school and system leaders. We must ensure all this at a time when teachers and leaders are under increasing pressure from their workload, in particular in relation to accountability measures. At Kyra, we recognise that the well-being of our staff is key to ensuring the high quality learning and wellbeing of our pupils. As such, we are developing a new initiative – ‘Kyra Well-being’ – which aims to provide tiers of wellbeing support for headteachers and leaders within the alliance. This programme also builds upon our promise to one another to build social capital – mindful that well-being is an essential and significant part of our community of mutual support and professional generosity. Headship and school leadership can be a lonely place, and whilst teams within schools, leadership teams, and governing bodies can offer a significant degree of emotional support, on occasion there is a need to talk to a colleague from outside of your own setting, in confidence, and with understanding. In addition to this, we believe that a carefully planned programme of pastoral development, welfare and professional sustenance can contribute to highly effective leadership.

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⁶ From ‘Mindset – the new psychology of success’, Carol Dweck, 2007