SSAT National Conference 2015
3-4 December, Manchester Central

QUALITY & EQUITY

Closing the gaps while raising the bar
The SSAT National Conference 2015 focuses on the two principles that underpin all excellent education systems: quality and equity. If each individual school, and our society as a whole, is serious about social mobility then we have to continue closing the gap while raising the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Programme highlights include:

- Three conference strands: Closing the Gaps, Raising the Bar, and Leading Learning
- Inspiring keynote speakers
- Over 30 school-led workshop choices
- Structured networking with other school leaders
- Conference dinner with No School is an Island (Discs) entertainment
- Lively exhibition zone

Confirmed speakers include:

- Professor James Arthur
  Director, Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues
- Professor Tanya Byron
  Clinical Psychologist
- Professor Guy Claxton
  Professor Emeritus, Winchester University
- Joan Deslandes
  Headteacher, Kingsford Community School
- Sir John Dunford OBE
  Former Pupil Premium Champion, DfE
- Professor Becky Francis
  Professor of Education and Social Justice, KCL
- Dave Harris
  Managing Director, Independent Thinking
- Ruth Hunt
  Chief Executive, Stonewall
- Dr Lisa Lande
  Executive Director, Teacher Voice Centre
- Shona MacLeod
  Senior Research Manager, NFER
- Ani Magill
  Headteacher, St John the Baptist School
- Ross Morrison McGill
  Deputy Headteacher, Quintin Kynaston Community School
- Professor Tim Oates CBE
  Group Director, Cambridge Assessment
- Dr Russ Quaglia
  President, QISA
- Tom Sherrington
  Headteacher, Highbury Grove School
- Stephen Tierney
  Executive Headteacher, Blessed Edward Bamber MAT
- Bill Watkin
  Director of Policy, SSAT
- Sue Williamson
  Chief Executive, SSAT

To see the full programme and book your place, visit ssatuk.co.uk/nc15

Reserve your SSAT member free delegate place

As a full secondary SSAT member, you’ll get one free delegate place at this year’s National Conference. To reserve your place and book additional delegates, visit ssatuk.co.uk/nc15.

Membership offers a range of great benefits: to find out more and join the biggest and most active network of schools in the country, visit ssatuk.co.uk/ssat-membership.
The SSAT National Conference 2015 – Quality and Equity – focuses on three core themes: Closing the Gaps, Raising the Bar, and Leading Learning. Sue Williamson explains

The World was all before them, where to choose, Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide. They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow, Through Eden took thir solitarie way.

These are the final words of John Milton’s Paradise Lost, in which he describes how, having had the history of mankind revealed to them, Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise.

But, in typical Miltonic fashion, the expulsion from heaven ends on a note of optimism; Adam and Eve have “all the world before them”, and are free to choose their own place of rest each night.

In many ways, I think this scene bears some resemblance to our current educational landscape. The government has reiterated its vision that school improvement and innovation should be in the hands of leaders and teachers, free to make their own decisions and shape the profession themselves.

I am lucky to visit many schools across the SSAT network, and am continually impressed by the innovative work that I see: imaginative ways of engaging and supporting the most vulnerable learners in our system, relentless attempts to achieve ever more, and courageous leaders ensuring that learning is at the heart of all they do.

Innovation is alive and flourishing in our schools. The journey of our schools. The journey required some abandonment as well as discernment.

“The latter allowed us to separate the wheat from the chaff of education ideas, the non-negotiable from personal choice, the profound from the irrelevant. Teachers these days wouldn’t know a silver bullet if it was given to them nor thank you for it, they are far too research-savvy and knowledgeable. There were and are no quick fixes.”

In May this year, the SSAT Vision 2040 group came together to articulate a shared vision for education – beyond five-year policy cycles. I thought it was a bold and inspiring vision, paving the way to a period of “system maturity”, when school leaders exercise true autonomy and agency. Their vision was founded on the dual principles of quality and equity, which have informed the theme of this year’s National Conference.

Written as though already in 2040, the pamphlet’s narrator reflects that “equity, quality and agency are interdependent, mutually supportive values which produced a positive spiral of improvement”. They continue: “They form the key values on which our education system has been built and they permeate the life of our schools. The journey required some abandonment as well as discernment.

“The latter allowed us to separate the wheat from the chaff of education ideas, the non-negotiable from personal choice, the profound from the irrelevant. Teachers these days wouldn’t know a silver bullet if it was given to them nor thank you for it, they are far too research-savvy and knowledgeable. There were and are no quick fixes.”

The World was all before them, where to choose, Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide.

National Conference 2015

At this year’s conference, we will continue to explore how we can work together to build a truly high-quality, high-equity education system. We are delighted to be joined by national and international speakers who we hope will inspire and challenge in equal measure.

Professor Guy Claxton will be asking “cognition, character and certification – can we have it all?”

How can we achieve excellent outcomes for our young people while simultaneously developing their ability to think critically and broadly, and become responsible, caring members of society?

Dr Russ Quaglia from the USA has spent a lifetime’s career analysing the key drivers that lead to student engagement, focusing on how schools can unlock potential through meaningful student voice and raising aspirations.

A recent survey by the Children’s Society placed England’s students among the unhappiest in the world, so we are pleased that Professor Tanya Byron, in her entertaining and irreverent fashion, will explore how we can protect young people’s mental health.

A clinical psychologist and host of several BBC shows on parenting, Tanya offers a fresh perspective on students’ welfare and wellbeing.

Sir John Dunford will close the conference by summing up what we know about social mobility. Crucially, Sir John’s argument is that it is not merely enough to close the gaps, but that to stop the gaps arising in the first place we have to continually improve the system as a whole. This is why we have chosen to focus on three key strands:

• Closing the Gaps – identifying and closing the gaps between different groups of students (see page 4).

• Raising the Bar – continually improving a range of educational outcomes for all (see page 5).

• Leading Learning – putting learning at the heart of school leadership (see page 6).

Closing the Gaps

Under Closing the Gaps, we will consider why and how different gaps arise, and what schools are doing to close them.

Keynote sessions from Professor Becky Francis and Ruth Hunt will explore, respectively, the role of social identities on educational outcomes, and the need to end homophobia, bi and transphobic bullying in our schools.

Raising the Bar

Under Raising the Bar, schools will offer tips and solutions for maximising potential at key stages 4 and 5, while also developing students’ characters and non-cognitive skills.

Keynote speaker Professor James Arthur from the Jubilee Centre will argue that character education needs to be underpinned by a strong moral framework, while Professor Tim Oates will consider what we know about achievement and progress, based on international evidence.

Leading Learning

Under Leading Learning, we will explore whole-school approaches to developing a learning culture, for staff as well as students, innovative curriculum and assessment models, and inspiring school-improvement case studies. Keynotes from school leaders Ross Morrison McGill and Tom Sherrington will offer practical ideas from the chalkface.

All of this will be supplemented by engaging and informative school-led workshops, profiling some of the most interesting practice from across the network.

Above all, the SSAT National Conference is a chance for members to come together, share ideas, and forge new links with whom to take “wandering steps” in the future.

This is why, for the first time ever, one free place is now included in your full secondary membership offer. The world truly is before us. Let’s grab it with both hands and make it ours.

Sue Williamson is chief executive of the SSAT.

Further information

The SSAT National Conference 2015 takes place in Manchester on December 3 and 4. Visit www.ssatuk.co.uk/nc15.
Closing the Gaps

Headteacher Joan Deslandes

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eadteacher Joan Deslandes regards closing the gaps between different groups of students as a vital part of her school’s role.

Since 2002, she has been head of Kingsford Community School in Newham, east London, one of the most deprived local authorities in the country. Around 60 per cent of her 1,500 pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium.

Thanks to initiatives like a robust data-tracking system (with five data collection points each year) and well-targeted support and interventions, the 11 to 16 comprehensive has made huge strides in narrowing gaps in pupils’ attainment in recent years. The school was in the top 10 per cent nationally for pupil progress last year (2014).

“The gaps for Pupil Premium and the most able pupils at Kingsford are significantly better than the national average,” explained Ms Deslandes.

The Department for Education performance tables for 2014 showed, for example, that while progress in English for Pupil Premium pupils nationally was -12 per cent, at Kingsford it was -1 per cent. In maths, progress for Pupil Premium pupils at Kingsford was -7 per cent, compared to -17 per cent nationally.

The data for Kingsford’s most able students is impressive too – +17 per cent for progress in English, compared to +15 per cent nationally, and +15 per cent in maths, the same as the national average.

“We identify gaps by comparing the progress made in each subject and year group with the nationally expected rates for pupils at the same starting point,” said Ms Deslandes.

“We have developed a robust and rigorous data-tracking system that allows class teachers and subject leaders to compare the performance of discrete groups, using both summative and formative assessment tasks. We have found this is very helpful in helping us to be informed about where to make the appropriate interventions.”

Staff are supportive of the approach because, as Ms Deslandes emphasised, “to have good teaching and learning you need good data to inform your practice”.

All pupils have progress targets and the school works closely with parents to ensure that everyone understands the tracking system and why intervention is sometimes needed.

The school’s intervention measures include running extra sessions after school and on Saturday mornings, often in small groups, for children who are not making the expected rate of progress, subject-specific parents’ evenings, parental engagement workshops, and exam preparation workshops.

“It is a very focused approach,” said Ms Deslandes. “We are making sure that pupils have the opportunity to realise their full potential. Good qualifications mean good life chances. By addressing the gaps, we’re not placing a glass ceiling on their potential – we’re allowing them to flourish.”

Keynote: Closing the Gaps

Speaker: Prof Becky Francis

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chools across the country are working hard to identify and close the gaps in children’s attainment and educational experience.

Gaps arise for many reasons, but two of the strongest predictors of educational attainment are family background and socio-economic inequality.

“The effects of financial inequalities and inequalities in social capital mean that children start at very different places on entry into the education system,” explained Becky Francis, professor of education and social justice at King’s College London.

“There is a wealth of evidence showing that children from low socio-economic groups tend to be behind their middle class peers in terms of vocabulary, as well as being less familiar with the environment and accoutrements of the education system – so they start at a disadvantage.

“What is particularly worrying is that those gaps on arrival into the education system don’t narrow. They actually become wider as children progress through the system. This implicates the education system itself in perpetuating inequalities.”

Prof Francis is leading a three-year research project called Best Practice in Grouping Students. The project’s starting point is long-standing research showing that disadvantaged pupils are “over-represented” in low sets and streams and that these pupils make less progress than their peers in higher sets and those in mixed attainment groups.

“We are drawing on the international research to design an intervention that strips out practices that have been identified as having a negative impact,” said Prof Francis. These might include, for instance, schools where subject experts tend to teach higher sets or where pupils rarely get the chance to move between sets.

“The intervention will seek to ensure that pupils are set purely on the basis of attainment and not due to socio-economic background or behavioural issues, that high expectations are communicated to all students, and that all students access a rich curriculum.”

• Prof Francis has contributed a chapter on unlocking the potential of all pupils to Lessons Learned: Putting experience to work, a joint report from Ark and King’s College London. Visit http://bit.ly/1LnyRvk

Questions for your school team

1. What are the different groups that make up our school community? Have we written pen-portraits of each of them and identified their barriers to learning?

2. How do you systematically track individual students in a meaningful way? What data do we collect and how do we use it?

3. Currently, what interventions and strategies do we use to close the gap for particular students?
The second theme at SSAT National Conference will be Raising the Bar – continually improving a range of educational outcomes for all students. Delegates will discuss the challenges of showing progress over time, attainment at key stages 2, 4 and 5, character, non-cognitive skills, employability and more.

**Speaker: Ani Magill**

**Introducing the Strands**

9:30am, Thursday, December 3

Headteacher Ani Magill is determined that the 1,200 students at St John the Baptist School in Woking, Surrey, should receive the best education possible.

“As well as wanting the children to be happy and successful we’ve got three aims,” she said. “The first is that they get better results than they would at any other school. The second is that they gain the skills they would at any other school. The third is that we make a contribution to society.”

Ms Magill has been head of the Baptist School in Woking, Surrey, for more than 20 years, during which time she has also held six interim headships at schools in difficulty. She firmly believes that improving educational outcomes for all students is a matter of concentrating on teaching and learning rather than on excessive paperwork.

She says that senior leadership teams should be “focused 100 per cent on enabling the teachers to teach and the children to learn”.

With that in mind, she has written a booklet for her own leadership team. Entitled 365 (+45) Ways to Improve Your School, it includes advice like being visible around school and speaking to every member of staff each week.

Ms Magill is particularly concerned that some schools focus far too much on Ofsted: “I worry that heads have swapped the word ‘children’ for the word ‘Ofsted’. They say things like ‘we need to do these things for Ofsted’ – but the trouble is that when people get obsessed with Ofsted they lose sight of the real point of education.”

**Questions for your school team**

1. What is our school’s vision, ethos and values? Could all staff, students and parents articulate these? How do they manifest themselves across the school?

2. How do we define a quality education, beyond Ofsted definitions? What educational outcomes do we seek to secure for our students?

3. What is a typical day for a student at our school like? Has a member of our team ever shadowed one student for the entire day?

St John the Baptist’s leadership team makes it a priority “to find, recruit, develop and retain good teachers”. The team spends all day in lessons, supporting teachers and monitoring the quality of teaching.

“Because of Ofsted, some schools have these elaborate systems where teachers are observed three times a year,” Ms Magill continued. “I think that’s a complete waste of time because teachers teach 1,000 lessons a year. I’m not interested in how somebody can teach a lesson in two weeks’ notice. The quality of teaching is what happens when it’s raining and it’s last lesson on a Thursday in November. It’s about what happens every day and in every lesson.

“Teachers here know they have to prepare good lessons and teach well. The lessons are fun and staff morale is very high. As long as teachers deliver on the grades then it’s up to them how they do it.”

The school’s approach is paying dividends. In 2014, Ofsted judged it outstanding in every category and 90 per cent of pupils achieved at least five A* to C GCSEs this year including English and maths.
QUALITY AND EQUITY

Leading Learning

Speaker: Stephen Tierney

Putting learning at the heart of school leadership is a “core purpose” as far as Stephen Tierney is concerned. “Schools are about learning,” he said, “and the reason we exist as leaders is to make sure that that core purpose is being pursued.”

Mr Tierney has years of experience as a head. He was headteacher of St Mary’s Catholic College in Blackpool for 13 years before becoming executive headteacher of St Mary’s and Christ the King Catholic Primary School, a one-form entry primary school.

He is now executive director of the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, which comprises St Mary’s, Christ the King Catholic Primary, and St Cuthbert’s Catholic Academy.

Mindful of the huge demands on headteachers’ time, Mr Tierney believes that it is essential for heads to stand back and look at learning “within its wider context”. In other words, they should avoid being “spread too thin”.

He emphasises the fact that there are no “silver bullets” in teaching and makes a point of saying to colleagues “let’s slow down a bit and do a few things really well”.

This academic year, Mr Tierney and his team plan to introduce more collaborative planning, although teachers will still have “a lot of freedom to approach the teaching of a subject in a way that they feel is best for their students”.

He said: “We need to improve further the quality of planning, ensuring that the level of challenge is high enough and the clarity that teachers need before they walk into the classroom is there. It’s also about saying ‘what worked well?’ and ‘what have I learned that will enable me to do the job better?’”

Introducing the Strands
9:30am, Thursday, December 3

Mr Tierney’s view is that “assessment was set up for leaders, not learners” and he describes the purpose of his school’s assessment policy as being “to find out what children don’t know and teach them it”.

Rather than obsessing about what grade children are at he believes that it is more important to establish what pupils need to do to improve and progress. The same data can also be used to help teachers focus on which elements of their own teaching can be “tweaked and improved”.

“It’s not just about getting through exams, although getting through exams is important because it gives young people a passport to a better life. Our job as leaders is to get the teaching right. Learning is personal, it’s social, it’s moral, it’s about helping young people and staff to grow and develop.”

Stephen Tierney is also a member of the Headteachers’ Roundtable and leads the SSAT’s Aspiring Senior Leaders’ Programme. He is chair of the SSAT Vision 2040 group. Read his Leading Learner blog at http://leadinglearner.me/

Speaker: Ross Morrison McGill

Ross Morrison McGill believes that school leaders need to give teaching staff the time and space to “learn, consolidate and share best practice together”.

Thanks to his 103,000 followers on Twitter, his widely read blog, TeacherToolkit, and his books, he is one of the best-known teachers in the UK. Most of his time, however, is taken up with his role as deputy head at Quintin Kynaston, an 11 to 18 comprehensive school in north west London with 1,350 students.

Mr McGill joined Quintin Kynaston in September 2014, just as Ofsted judged that after “a period of challenges and difficulties” the school “required improvement”. He has since written publicly about what he calls “the unreliability and invalidity” of this judgement.

In the last year, the school has made a point of focusing on CPD and staff learning. It now has a collapsed timetable by an hour each week and that time is dedicated to staff CPD.

“It doesn’t mean we do something new each week,” said Mr McGill. “We consolidate a lot of practice we have already done and revisit marking, planning and tracking data by sharing best practice with each other, both in a structured and unstructured setting.”

He makes a point of keeping up-to-date with the latest education research and was particularly struck by a review published by the Teacher Development Trust calling for a move towards longer-term programmes of CPD, support and engagement.

Mr McGill sees staff wellbeing as key to a school’s success: “Happy teachers mean happy kids and happy kids mean a happy school. In turn we get happier outcomes.”

He has also launched a bursary for Quintin Kynaston teachers who want to do long-term research. So far 15 staff have opted to do this. Those engaged in research are encouraged to share their work at action research evenings.

Mr McGill blogs most days and says that writing about teaching informs his own professional development and that of others.

He still teaches design technology and as well as supporting pupils sees his role as developing the skills of teachers and support staff: “The culture of CPD in my new school is phenomenal. It can only grow stronger.”

Ross Morrison McGill is an SSAT Lead Practitioner. His books 100 Ideas for Secondary Teachers and Teacher Toolkit: Helping you survive your first five years are both published by Bloomsbury Education. Visit the Teacher Toolkit blog at http://teachertoolkit.me

Keynote: Leading Learning
1:25pm, Friday, December 4

The third theme focuses on putting learning at the heart of school leadership. Delegates will debate the curriculum, assessment after levels, CPD and staff learning, whole-school pedagogy, student voice and co-construction, and evidence-informed practice.
Eight steps for making the most of the Pupil Premium

Alexander Harris gives us eight steps to ensure your Pupil Premium strategies are effective

The following eight points provide schools with a suggested framework for identifying the real challenges faced by their students and suggest ways to use the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) to remove these barriers.

Although grounded in an exploration of all things PPG, these recommendations are not limited to the Pupil Premium cohort. Underpinning it all is the conviction that if schools say that they fundamentally believe that “pupils should be at the centre”, then absolutely everything they do should not only reflect this but be unequivocally directed towards it.

This is about inspiring a culture where schools genuinely value and support their pupils as whole young people, just as much as they value the grades that pupils leave with.

1. Establish ground rules
At its heart, the purpose of the PPG is to equip schools to support pupils who are at an educational disadvantage. Before considering how to do this, schools must have a clear vision and understanding of what this actually means – that the PPG is a tool to tackle disadvantage in all its forms, helping to remove any barriers faced by pupils. It must therefore be consciously disassociated from connotations of poverty and low achievement. Looking beyond national tracking and accountability measures, the real challenges for pupils are localised and intensely individual, so require a school-specific set of individualised interventions.

2. Rigorous individual profiling at point of entry
Identification of the challenges faced by every pupil should be made at the point of entry through a definite process of assessing the whole child. It is essential that every pupil is profiles holistically where developing an understanding of their non-cognitive ability and general wellbeing is as important as assessing their cognitive ability.

The difficulty lies in accurate testing, but a holistic picture can be achieved through a clear and consistent assessment process that uses several data points. These assessments could include:
- A generalised psychological analysis test.
- Qualitative reflective surveys of pupils and parents.
- Interviews with trained staff members, which could include senior leaders, pastoral leaders, tutors, or educational psychologists.

Once this data has been collected it should be recorded in a centralised database. From here, challenges for each and every child can be identified, allowing for the implementation of both very general and deeply individual intervention strategies.

Through this process, each pupil is explicitly and holistically examined so the child can feel valued as an individual and the institution is empowered to value them as a whole. Though this is certainly a significant investment in time and money, a system like this will facilitate a clear evidence-based approach to pastoral care.

3. Keep on tracking
Once established, this system should be kept up-to-date through on-going tracking. A system of mentoring, supported by further tests and surveys if necessary, would allow for regular updates to the central database and facilitate an agile response to changing pupil needs.

Mentoring could also be provided, for example through:
- The pastoral system by heads of year, heads of house or form tutors.
- Supervised peer-to-peer mentoring groups.
- A dedicated department of trained learning mentors, should funding allow.

4. Support all pupils
This information should be used to support all pupils. Interventions to remove barriers for pupils should never be limited by pupils’ eligibility for the Pupil Premium. With a clear system to identify need, the school is undoubtedly best placed to decide how best to allocate their PPG funding to alleviate disadvantage.

5. Triangulate with further evidence for intervention
Alongside discussing creative solutions, use good practice examples from within, from similar schools, from national good practice and consult education research including the Education Endowment Foundation’s Teaching and Learning Toolkit to find the most appropriate intervention for each identified challenge.

6. Share the knowledge
Share this collated information in a meaningful way among all stakeholders to help them help the child. For example, provide “need-to-know” information to classroom teachers in the form of four concise bullet points per child, while providing more detailed information for parents and tutors. Sharing this process, headline data and stories of success or failure with Ofsted is also vital for accountability.

7. Individualised implementation
Provide more general “good teaching” interventions at Wave 1 and implement intensely individualised intervention at Wave 3. For example, train teachers to use feedback more effectively at Wave 1, but also purchase a bike for that one student who cannot travel to school easily and is consistently late. Or provide classes for both high and low-attaining students who lack confidence in their abilities while also organising university trips for pupils who have no family connections to higher education, irrespective of their family’s income or aspirations.

8. Towards a culture of the whole child
Schools must recognise the value of character education, mindfulness teaching and the teaching of health/wellbeing (non-cognitive skills) and deeply embed these approaches within the received curriculum.

In so doing they will support the holistic development of all pupils, including helping to improve their attainment, and facilitate a culture that explicitly values the whole child. Pupils are people and they deserve support in all aspects of their development.

- Alexander Harris teaches history at Sidney Stringer Academy in Coventry and completed this report during a summer project with SSAT.

Further information
The recommendations in this article are based on the report Poverty and the PPG: Addressing the real challenges of the Pupil Premium cohort by Alexander Harris. It is available to download from www.ssatuk.co.uk
The World was all before them, where to choose their place of rest, and Providence their guide.

Sue Williamson channels Milton on page 3

What is particularly worrying is that those gaps on arrival into the education system don’t narrow. They actually become wider as children progress through the system. This implicates the education system itself in perpetuating inequalities.

Professor Becky Francis is helping close the gaps on page 4

Our job as leaders is to get the teaching right. Learning is personal, it’s social, it’s moral, it’s about helping young people and staff to grow and develop.

Stephen Tierney as Leading Learning on page 6

The Pupil Premium is a tool to tackle disadvantage in all its forms, helping to remove any barriers faced by pupils. It must therefore be consciously disassociated from connotations of poverty and low achievement.

Recommendations from a new SSAT report on the Pupil Premium on page 7

Character education lies at the heart of a child’s education. Without developing the character of a child you’re not really educating the child at all.

Professor James Arthur on raising the bar higher on page 5

Find out more about the conference programme and speakers and book your place at ssatuk.co.uk/nc15.

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