

# HMC Spring Conference: 1 May 2019

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I am delighted to welcome you all to a unique moment in HMC's history. In this 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we have dedicated our whole Spring Conference to celebrating the huge contribution that HMC schools make to education and wider society, and to consider how we can do more.

This year we have seen HMC speak in the public domain and work behind the scenes on a whole range of issues such as mental health, fair outcomes in exams, character education, teacher pensions, VAT, the importance of sport, unconditional offers, the flourishing partnership work, bursary programmes for looked after children and more. However, I hope that the focus today will be useful for us all.

Our schools pursue excellence, but also believe that all pupils should have an excellent education. They not only offer to nurture the whole child, but believe that chance should be offered to every child.

Attacking independent schools won't improve state schools. We wish for them to have appropriate funding, a benign policy environment and a supply of top teachers. Despite what might be implied by our critics, independent schools can never solve the problems of the whole education sector, never mind the social mobility challenges of the

whole country, but we can do our bit. We are playing our part, ever more so.

This conference is about us sharing our thinking and best practice, encouraging us to grow our existing support to local communities. We are already working at school, local, regional and national levels; indeed many work on an international scale. Independent schools are redoubling their efforts and this conference is aimed at celebrating, sharing and encouraging that shared commitment.

I am particularly pleased, therefore, to welcome the state school heads who have taken time from their schedules to be here today. We value your fellowship and the many things we learn from you. Thank you.

So – *Partnership and Collaboration in Practice* – it is hard to think of a more important theme to gather us together, or a better time to be doing so.

Five days ago, the ISC census proved to the world that we are doing more than ever before to benefit state schools, our local communities and wider society. This should give us confidence and a sense of momentum.

Let's look at the evidence: Evidence which is frankly, uncomfortable to those taking an ideological position against us and persuasive to those with an open mind.

We have an international reach that generates UK international influence abroad that will help for generations to come.

We save the taxpayer over £3.5B in state school funding of the places of children we educate, we generate over 300 000 jobs, pay over £4B in taxes and add the economic value of a major UK city.

Our value is more than financial.

There are nearly 11,500 partnership projects now recorded on the *Schools Together* website – up by nearly a thousand in one year.

Every HMC school is involved in partnership work. These have a direct impact on tens of thousands of young people educated in the state sector. They include sport, drama, music and other activities and are making a real difference to large numbers of individual children.

I was at the HMC conference several years ago when Chris Ray, former Head at Manchester Grammar School, stood up, in the face of similar criticism from Suzy Leather from the Charity Commission and listed 200 community projects. He said, *'Are you telling me that all of*

*these are counted as zero value and the only thing that matters is bursaries?’*

It seems to me that she then realised that bursaries should not be the only metric of public benefit and that is as true now as it was then.

Means tested bursaries are higher than ever, totalling £420 million – well over a million pounds a day - and a 6% increase on last year.

We are offering free places and extra care to even the hardest to help pupils and I look forward to hearing about the 465 disadvantaged children who have been placed in boarding schools by the Royal National Children’s Springboard Foundation.

Remember too that we are offering to make a step change in access to independent schools by offering up to 10,000 places to lower income pupils every year, free to parents and at a cost to the state of the equivalent it would spend on a state school place. Most ISC schools are not selective so it is important to remember that these would not just be for the brightest children. This policy would be a real breakthrough.

Bursaries are seen as important and they are. I see widening access to our schools as fundamental. A well targeted bursary changes lives. Each school has many stories of success and inspiration; one of mine is Izzy, an alumna of Reigate Grammar School, talks of her childhood relying on food parcels. She then received a bursary to come to RGS.

Her life has been transformed and, via Cambridge University and time volunteering to help in a refugee camp, she is now on the fast track course at the Civil Service. It is for the thousands of young people we can help, who are like Lyzz, that schools are ramping up their fundraising teams and that is important.

So, sensibly, practically, quietly, positive change is happening.

But, listen to our critics, and you will hear none of this. Our work is disregarded, and serious, sustainable projects are sneered at by those who care more for politics than pupils.

Everyone here, I'm sure would also recognise the calls for greater fairness in education, as in society. It is clear from what I have described here today that our schools are playing their part, and it's clear by the fantastic turnout that there is energy and commitment to do more.

The political threat is real: we only need to consider TPS, the loss of business rates relief in Scotland, and the Parties' manifesto pledges to know that is the case.

Attacking independent schools will not make state schools better. An exodus into state schools will simply increase class sizes and put further billions on the schools budget. Whilst we genuinely

understand the frustration with unfairnesses in education and society more generally, ultimately, harming our sector is little more than a smoke screen for what really matters - creating a fairly funded and resourced state education system. Many state schools are already world class – but across the country there are too many children not attending great schools. We want to help. We are helping.

Our guests this afternoon, authors David Kynaston and Francis Green, will not agree with much of what I have said. But we need to listen to and understand those who disagree with us – and I remain hopeful that we can find common ground, as we have already been trying to establish through genuine dialogue. I thank those members who have also debated publicly with them, and look forward to hearing Matthew Taylor, the esteemed Chief Executive of the RSA and former political strategist to Tony Blair, in conversation with them.

So what's next? First, my thanks.

To Mike Buchanan, for his leadership in putting the programme together; to Ian Power for his unstinting advice and good sense; to Sue Bishop for her lead on the Public Affairs Strategy, Public Relations and helping us communicate; to Denise Bennett and Sue Gray and all the team in the office in Market Harborough for making this conference happen; to the communications team for giving us a voice and, most of all, to all the presenters, who have taken on a big task alongside an

even bigger day job. They have done so with good heart and good grace and we will learn from their experience.

So, I hope today will help us understand that we are all at different points on the journey but travelling in the same direction nonetheless. I want it to be encouragement and a call to arms to all in the sector. We are doing more than ever to add value to society and together we can do more still in the areas of bursaries, partnerships and community engagement.

I hope that you find the conference useful as we work in partnership for the good of children and the wider community.

I am inspired by the consistent commitment that I see from independent schools. From our ancient foundations to our modern aspirations, we are dismantling the ivory tower cliché and working with our partners to build a new future where we are more appropriately seen working shoulder to shoulder with our partners. I know that independent schools care deeply about all children, wherever they are educated. It comes with the territory of being a teacher – to make a difference, to help children. We commission our students, as they leave our schools, to go and make the world a better place. We must do the same.

Thank you.

