Inspiring Leadership Conference Speech.

Learning-Centred Leadership.

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Slide 1 – (title slide)
Many of us will have seen Daniel Day Lewis' portrayal of the great American President Abraham Lincoln last year.
In the very first dialogue of the film, Lincoln – the 16th President - sits in the rain talking to soldiers – both black and white – serving in the Union army. America is in the midst of civil war.

His gaze fixed, Lincoln probes the soldiers with question after question. He listens intently to what they have to tell him.
The soldiers speak of the recent battles at Poison Springs and Jenkin's ferry. Of the horror and brutality on all sides.

Lincoln sits quietly and thoughtfully.
He is immediately presented to us as a learner, portraying humility, curiosity, and a desire to understand the people and the world around him. He is one of the most important men in the world and yet he is still the learner.

Lincoln is considered to be among the greatest – if not the greatest - American Presidents. And he left a fantastic legacy – the abolition of slavery.

Slide 2 (showing photo of Lincoln)
His beginnings were humble. His father was an illiterate labourer, his mother died when he was just nine years old, and he had little formal schooling to speak of.

Yet from an early age right through to his Presidency, Lincoln possessed two important traits – intense curiosity and a love of learning.

As President, he deliberately surrounded himself with key rivals and advisers with a wide range of perspectives because he knew they would challenge him, help him to be a learner and help to make him a better leader. As he himself said:

Slide 3 (Lincoln quote)
"I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday."

The leader as learner.
I believe the success of our education system depends – more than ever - on our ability as leaders to be learners ourselves and to know how to enable those with whom we work to be powerful learners too. That is why the theme of my speech is **learning-centred leadership.**

Not only is learning at the very core of what happens in our classrooms and in our schools. Learning also sits at the very foundation of a self-improving education

system. It is by learning from one another – as teachers and leaders - that we will generate the professional confidence and empowerment to chart the destiny of our education system and – like Lincoln – create a legacy that is truly transformational
What do I mean by **learning-centred leadership**? Well here is a diagram that shows the 4 elements.
Slide 4 (pie chart diagram)

Learning-centred leaders:

1. **have a compulsive interest in making sure that all the children and young people in their care become powerful learners**.

2. **establish a community whereby all staff develop and improve their professional expertise**

3. **are effective and enthusiastic learners themselves and they model these behaviours.**

4. They have an insatiable well of curiosity and constantly analyse how they can improve their own performance.

5. **help to lead the system and support future learning.** They are committed to the sustained success of children in **all** schools and to the development of the education profession more generally. They aim to leave things in much better shape than they found them and they expect the same from those who come after them.

So let me look in more detail at each of these four aspects of learning-centred leadership.

Slide 5 (sub-heading 1)

1. **Leaders who ensure powerful learning for children and young people.**

We all know what an impact great teachers can make. Dylan William points out that the students of the best teachers learn in 6 months what students of the least effective teachers take 2 years to learn. We also know that, for disadvantaged pupils, the influence of teacher quality is even more profound than it is for those **not** so disadvantaged.

And inspiration is an important part of what the most effective teachers bring. In his seminal book, Visible Learning, John Hattie suggests that when people are asked to identify the teachers who really made a difference to their education – those who really turned them on to a subject or perhaps a future career, who inspired them - most people will think of just 2 or 3 of their teachers.

CfBT's own research into inspirational teaching - working with researchers from Oxford and Worcester universities - found that, across different contexts , inspiring teachers consistently exhibit certain key behaviours. Regardless of the age of the children taught or the subject context, our observation showed us that almost all of them:

Slide 6 - (Key Behaviours of Inspiring Teachers)

- **Demonstrated genuine warmth and empathy** towards all students

- **Created a sense of security about learning -encouraging experimentation** and the ability to make mistakes without damaging self-esteem

- **Used highly interactive whole class instruction** with extremely skilful use of questioning;

- **Encouraged students to communicate frequently with one another** on task-orientated issues

- **Developed meta-cognitive skills,** with students given substantial opportunities for the reflection on their own work.

Where this research becomes **really** interesting, is that we asked the **students** to tell us about the experience of being taught by an inspirational teacher. Young people were given a whole series of statements about these teachers and asked to say whether they agreed with each statement. In all classes – irrespective of age and context – they came up with remarkably similar descriptions of their teachers:

Slide 7 – (responses by students)

1. My teacher believes that all students can do well
2. My teacher believes that learning is important
3. My teacher seems to like teaching
4. My teacher expects me to do well
5. My teacher is interested in what the students think

So that's what the best teachers do.

And looking at this list, this is predominantly about mindset and attitude. I think we have a right to expect this from **all** teachers.

As learning-centred leaders our role is to ensure that all children in our school have the opportunity to learn well. Now of course much of this is about how we recruit and develop our staff but it is also about how we as leaders communicate our absolute commitment to helping every child to become a powerful learner. I think school leaders have a responsibility to be deeply knowledgeable about what works in terms of classroom practice - it is the core business of the school. You may have someone to lead the work to whom you delegate this responsibility but it is beholden on you as head teacher or principal to know enough about the emerging evidence of what works to ask challenging questions, to signpost colleagues to recent evidence and to remove barriers to learning if they occur.
What I am arguing is that as a leader you may or may not be the expert on teaching in your school but your role is always to provide the relentless focus on high quality teaching and learning for every child. In those schools where all children succeed – including the most disadvantaged – we know that the fundamental belief in every child as a learner begins at the very top. School leaders set the tone for good or ill. If **you** do not tolerate 'excuses' for any child, your **colleagues** are also unlikely to tolerate excuses. If **you** believe every single child can and will succeed – your colleagues are likely to believe that too.

Now I do think it is easy for leaders, and therefore schools, to be knocked off course here -to be distracted from the core business of learning.

The most successful companies and organisations have only a very few goals. E.g. Apple.

Apple has only a handful of products yet it is one of the most successful companies in the world.
The technicians and experts in those organisations are able to focus on incremental improvement and development, building upon success and capitalising knowledge – rather than be driven to distraction by the latest fad or idea.

One side effect of our high accountability school system combined with our relative autonomy to make decisions can mean that we have a great deal of stuff to deal with that requires leadership and decision-making and it is very easy for us to become sidetracked by other, quite legitimate, demands for our attention. Initiatives and proposals for change emanating from the government of the day – whilst usually perfectly sensible in isolation –can create huge challenges for an individual school trying to make sense of them all. Incidentally one of the reasons why London Challenge was so successful was that the strategy, the resource and the focus was a key priority for the department for 8 years. This is, frankly, absolutely extraordinary. Most policy initiatives last somewhere between 18 months and 3 years before the next one comes out.

So it is very easy for leaders to become bogged down by the relentlessness of the tasks required of us and what you might call "the tyranny of stuff"; to flit from one

task to the next, which is what we spend large parts of our time as leaders doing, and to lose our focus on the most important. As leaders in schools we have to be the guardians of the focus on "**always better learning"**

Slide **8 - "always better learning".**

I remember many years ago being involved in a review of a primary school and I found that each class did art on a Wednesday afternoon – which at the time stretched the scarce resources in the school. So I asked why they all did art on a Wednesday and I was told that it was because the caretaker liked to organise the cleaning on the Wednesday after school that way. So I went to see the caretaker and challenged him on it but he said that he didn't mind what day the teachers taught art. I said well the teachers have told me that it is because of you. To which he replied, "Oh that must have been the previous caretaker, he retired a few years ago". The school's curriculum was being driven by the caretaker who had retired a few years previously! The school was just continuing to do what it had always done without questioning why. That may be an extreme example, but how many of the routines in your school are there not for any good reason but just because they have always been done that way?

Humphrey Walters tells the story about the victorious England rugby world cup team and how they had to be ruthless and only focus on the key things that would make a difference . He uses the analogy of taking all the furniture out of the house – including all the things stuffed in drawers and in the back or wardrobes –and only putting back what was absolutely necessary.

I think that is a powerful point. What might de-cluttering your own school or our own organisations look like? How focused are we on what is absolutely crucial.

Slide 9 – (Stephen Denning quote)

As Stephen Denning says:

"Once a commitment is made, the goal will seem larger, bolder, and more exciting....leaders need to fix on it like a laser beam. They need to see it intensely, even obsessively. They feel it. They hear it. They taste it. They smell it. It becomes part of them, their very identity, because it is something they are committed to make happen, come what may, whatever it takes." **Stephen Denning, The Secret Language of Leadership**

Always better learning

Slide 10 – (sub-heading 2)

2. Leaders who enable all staff to develop their professional expertise

I'm sure many of you watched the excellent recent BBC series following the fortunes of 6 Teach First trainees – Tough Young Teachers.

I was struck in particular by the experiences of one of these new teachers. It was clear that she had a huge amount of potential as a teacher – she was intelligent, engaging and had a very strong moral purpose. It was just as clear that she struggled to translate this into effective classroom practice, and in particular to establish the conditions for learning in her classroom. Her school flagged her as a

cause for concern and senior managers and Teach First became increasingly involved in her teaching. After one of a series of difficult observations, she made a telling comment:

"*Surely everyone's rubbish when they* <u>*start*</u> *doing something*?"

This is, of course, true to an extent. It was certainly true of me when I first became a teacher. But it's much easier to improve when you **start** doing something than when you've done it a thousand times before, when habits have formed and where you're in your comfort zone. Teachers improve a lot in their early careers, but this improvement plateaus. And this is the real challenge for professional development– how do we get the so-so teachers to improve to be as good as the rest? Is it just about practice?

It is not as simple as that. In recent years the notion of 10,000 hours of practice to achieve mastery has taken hold. However, Daniel Goleman tells us that the rule has been lost in translation…

Slide 11 – (Daniel Goleman quote)

"The "10,000-hour rule" — that this level of practice holds the secret to great success in any field — has become sacrosanct gospel,….. The problem: it's only half true. If you are a duffer at golf, say, and make the same mistakes every time you try a certain swing or putt, 10,000 hours of practicing that error will not improve your game. You'll still be a duffer, albeit an older one"

As Goleman goes on to say, hours and hours of practice are necessary for great performance, but not sufficient.

Slide 12 – (photo of violinists)

The Ericsson study of violinists found that the best performing ones practised for hours but did so with full concentration on improving a particular aspect of their performance that an expert teacher identified.

This more subtle understanding is increasingly apparent in studies of how the best organisational learning works.

We know – for example through the excellent work of David Hargreaves – that the prevailing model of *sharing good practice* somewhat misses the mark: sharing good practice is effective for the sharers, but not as good for the recipients. The best get better and the so-so teachers just stay where they are. Instead, he tells us that CPD is most effective where it amounts to joint-practice development between colleagues. This is professional learning that is engrained into the life and practice of schools and the nature of partnership between schools. It is

Slide 13 – (David Hargreaves quote)

linked with whole-school improvement, it is continuous not occasional, and everyone is an active participant, fusing learning and development with daily professional practice." **(David Hargreaves)**

This has strong parallels with approaches taken in other high performing countries, particularly those in Asia.

Slide 14 (Photo of Japan and Shanghai classrooms)

The Japanese Lesson Study approach is now widely used, but Shanghai's Keli (Ker-Lee) has proven similarly effective. In both, teachers work collaboratively – within and between schools - to plan and to target specific learning aims or classroom problems, before implementing and then reviewing these lessons.

We also know that there is a growing shift towards more evidence-based approaches in education. As the leader of an organisation which is devoted to funding educational research, this is an exciting trend.

I think the advent of the Sutton Trust toolkit and the work of the Education Endowment Fund has made a huge contribution.
The fact that teachers and leaders can access evidence based on many thousands of research projects from all over the world and then apply it within their own classrooms is unprecedented.

The question for us as leaders is are we giving sufficient time and resource to our teachers and leaders to engage in research? Do we provide the right opportunity and climate for them to reflect upon their own learning, to investigate how they can improve and, like the expert violinists referred to earlier, work with others in a focused way on that improvement journey.

This would be a big leap for many schools in this country. But it is an important step if we are to build a profession which is responsible for its own improvement and which looks to itself for answers.
I want to say something in particular about inspection here. Now I am a fan of Ofsted. I think that the English education system is much better as a result of inspection and that when public money is being spent then you also need strong accountability systems. I admire Sir Michael Wilshaw and I trust him as a man of integrity and principle. No one I know is more passionate about making sure that all children learn, irrespective of their background.

But I also understand that the current Ofsted inspection system is extraordinarily high stakes – it can make or break a school and make or break a head teacher's career. If you get "outstanding" it opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you and for your school – system leadership roles and more. If, however, you get "requires improvement" twice over or if you get "special measures" then it can mean you can be out of a job, that you may struggle to get another headship, or to be seen ever again as a credible school leader.

This high stakes system is, in too many schools, understandably, creating a culture where compliance and adherence to frameworks is at the expense of professional inquiry and innovation. Where professional learning isn't so much profession-led as led by what Ofsted expects.

Now please don't misinterpret me. I am strongly of the view that teachers and leaders need to be accountable for the impact that their teaching has on learning. Only in that way can we ensure that autonomy comes with responsibility and we don't end up in the 'free for all' culture of the 1960s and 70s. We cannot and must not deprive children and young people of the high quality and high aspirational education that they need - and strong accountability and inspection procedures are at the heart of that.

But we must remember and be absolutely clear that Ofsted is a regulator. Its job – which it does well - is to report on school performance and effectiveness so that government, parents and the public can hold schools to account. Its job is not to inspire. It is not to promote innovation and creativity.

Can you imagine Quentin Tarintino or Danny Boyle developing a new film and looking to Ofcom for advice on structure and style?

Slide 15 (photo of Tarintino and Danny Boyle)

Of course not. They will take account of the regulator and make sure that they perform within those guidelines but they wouldn't look to Ofcom for inspiration. Nor should school leaders be dependent upon the Ofsted framework for their view of what an exceptional school looks like. Inspirational leaning-centred leaders look to research evidence, seek out examples of brilliant practice in other schools in the UK and internationally, they take a thorough account of the Ofsted framework and then they develop a compelling vision for their school that will excite and inspire the children and the staff.

By developing greater ownership of professional learning based on evidence we will see less dependency on top-down solutions and, as happens with the medical profession, we will see a more confident self-improving profession looking to itself for the answers. That is why it is so important that we establish a learning community in which all staff develop and improve their professional expertise.

Slide 16 (sub-heading 3)

3.Leaders who are enthusiastic learners themselves.
Like Lincoln, we need to embody the constant pursuit of ideas, evidence, challenge and knowledge . We need to be focused on our own self-improvement as leaders, learning from other leaders and from the evidence of what works.

This is harder than it sounds. Jonathan Haidt in his book "The Righteous Mind" argues that we always interpret evidence and situations by using our intuition. He says that we decide what we think by gut feel and then cast around for evidence to back up what we already believe. This, of course, explains why we will never have a truly evidence-based education profession. People who go to Finland or to Singapore or to Shanghai or to Ontario to see what they can learn from the education systems there tend to come back with their own gut feelings reinforced. They use the practices that they see there to reinforce the views that they already held strongly before they went.

So, as leaders, just relying on our own judgements and our own gut reaction to things can serve us well but it can also be very dangerous. In leadership, we must do all that we can to avoid isolated subjectivism and to welcome external perspectives. We must be deliberate, enthusiastic and proactive learners.

I know this may seem a strange thing to say when we have such strong accountability systems in place but I worry about complacency in leadership – at school level, at system level and, of course I worry about complacency in my own leadership. What happens when we become complacent in our leadership? Well we think that what we are doing and how we are leading is fine. We are still working hard, we are still putting the hours in, we are still dealing with loads and loads of challenges, we are still reviewing the data etc, but actually we've lost our drive and focus and our absolute determination to improve things. We have stopped asking ourselves the really hard questions. We are not actively seeking out with as much pace and enthusiasm as we used to do what is not going as well as it might and confronting it and we are not seeking out external challenge as much as we used to. And the most worrying thing about complacency is that we normally don't realise we've got it until it is too late.

So we need to take a hard look at ourselves and our organisations. Do we have enough of an external critique? We need to welcome and invite challenge and constructive feedback.

Our role as leaders therefore is to constantly be asking ourselves questions and challenging ourselves.

In his book, How the Mighty Fall, Jim Collins says:

Slide 17 – (Jim Collins quote)

"Like inquisitive scientists, the best corporate leaders we've researched remain students of their work, relentlessly asking questions – why, why, why? – and have an incurable compulsion to vacuum the brains of people they meet."

If we are to lead successful learning organisations we should model a strong passion for curiosity, for asking the "why" question more often, and for developing an evidence-based problem-solving strategy. The leaders that are successful and sustain their success are always asking themselves "I wonder why we are doing that" or "I wonder what might happen if we tried doing this differently"?"

As Einstein said:

Slide 18 (Einstein quote)

"I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious" Albert Einstein

But being a learner and being open about being a learner can be a challenge for some leaders – especially when we are trying to instil confidence amongst those we lead that we know what we are doing and that we are the right people to lead them

through this change. Some are wary about admitting that they are learning as a leader because they want to appear strong.

Interestingly, Brene Brown argues that it is the people who admit to their vulnerability who are happier and more successful.

Slide 19 – (Brene Brown quote)

What makes us vulnerable, she argues, makes us beautiful. Those who are open and honest about their vulnerability are more likely to take risks, to share their worries and thus empower others to feel able to share their worries too. People who are openly vulnerable are more likely to be authentic leaders and will thus tend to attract people to want to follow them. People will forgive leaders who make mistakes and admit them but they hate a cover-up or a blame culture. Frankly it takes confidence to admit to being a learner and to being vulnerable and those who do are actually probably more self-confident than those who give the impression that they know all the answers.

I believe that if we are to create a genuinely self-improving system, we need a critical mass of leaders who are as willing to be as open about their areas for development as they are about their strengths; leaders who are willing to discuss their needs as well as their triumphs with their colleagues in other schools. That must begin with school leaders who are the most accomplished in the system – many of you in the hall today. If **you** don't model this approach, you can be sure that others who are less confident will struggle to do so. That is my challenge to you and to myself – are we modelling learning-centred leadership and setting the tone for a self-improving system?

It is hard to get the balance here. As leaders we need to demonstrate that we are learners, ask for help, admit that we don't know the answers to some of the issues we are dealing with but at the same time we need to exude confidence and clarity so that those we work with feel that some of the time we actually know what we are doing. Those we lead need to see our vulnerability but they don't want a paranoid leader, a self-pitying leader or a whimpering wreck of a leader.

In my role as CEO of CfBT over the past 18 months or so I have been on a very steep learning curve as a leader –leading a complex education charity working in more than 40 different countries and contexts. Like some of you in a new leadership role, perhaps, I have sometimes felt out of my depth, unclear as to what to do, aware of my own lack of knowledge in key areas and not even sure where to go to get the right expert advice and support. But at times like that, when you feel embattled or uncertain I have found that it is important to remember 3 things:

Slide 20 (Leadership in challenging and uncertain times)

1. **hold onto your core values and principles,**
2. go back to the people management approaches that have worked well for you in the past
3. be an enthusiastic but focused learner

Now that brings me on to talking this morning about the really, really hard aspects of leadership. Those moments - and most of us do have them - when our stomachs turn to jelly. When we know we have a really, really difficult set of actions to take or meetings to hold or conversations to have and we want to stay in bed under the duvet on that morning. It may be to announce redundancies, to tackle competency, to meet with an angry group of parents, to suspend a member of staff or – and this is one of the toughest things we ever have to do - to manage things after the tragic death of a member of staff or a child in your school, The key point to make about these situations is that as leaders we learn how to cope in these highly challenging contexts by reflecting on our own practice.

I remember when I was a Director of Education in Knowsley and we decided to consult on closing a large number of primary and secondary schools all at the same time. I led the public meetings and at first I found the anger and the upset and the personal attacks extremely hard to deal with. I used to leave the meetings at the end and then burst into tears afterwards. But I gradually developed my expertise at handling these situations – reflecting on my mistakes and trying out different ways of managing the meetings – and eventually I became quite confident about them.

Slide 21 (Leading and learning in challenging times)

"*Detached involvement is the essence of leadership*" Reflecting on how we approach particular situations, being very mindful of what we are doing - in the moment - and then reflecting again later on what went well and what we could have done differently - is how we learn to lead.

Leadership in difficult situations is also about an attitude of mind. **Click** Feeling good is a skill. You can control it. It is possible to approach difficult situations and difficult people with joy, provided you are clear about your values and the processes you are going to use. **Click** As leaders we need to walk into the wind not run away from it. You know that moment when you walk into the staff room and it all goes quiet – that is when you stay rather than leave. Spend time in the places in your organisation where you feel least welcome, tackle difficult issues head on honestly, transparently and with empathy. I learned that one of the best way to manage those difficult school closure public meetings was to turn up early and make people a cup of tea when they arrived and I was always one of the last to leave afterwards. Once you accept that **Click** crises are going to be the norm for this part of your leadership then embrace them, adjust your stress levels accordingly and welcome the complexity. As a learning-centred leader we can draw upon the fact that we often learn most from the most difficult challenges. As I have said, feeling good is a skill.
As the writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou - who died recently said:

Slide 22 (Maya Angelou quote)

"*You may not control all the events that happen to you but you can decide not to be reduced by them*" Maya Angelou

One of my education heroes, Tim Brighouse, said that there are four characteristics needed to lead change successfully:

Slide 23 (Leadership qualities needed in times of change)

1. **Regard crises as the norm and complexity as fun**
   Learn how to feel good in stressful situations.
2. **A bottomless well of intellectual curiosity**
   Like Lincoln and Einsten, show constant curiosity
3. **A complete absence of paranoia and self-pity**
   Be a vulnerable, learning leader but not a paranoid one
4. **Unwarranted optimism.**

Tim Brighouse

I have already spoken about the first three of these this morning and I will speak more about that last one in the final section of my speech.

Slide 24 (Sub-heading 4)

***4.* Leaders who help to lead the system and support future learning**

Learning – centred leaders believe in supporting learning not just for the young people and the staff in their school but more widely. Their commitment to learning at every level drives forward their involvement in the wider system. They demonstrate a commitment to collaboration beyond their school, to the development of the profession and, crucially, the learning of the next generation of leaders who will follow after them.

Many of you will know about – and some of you will have been responsible for – the transformation of London's schools in recent years.

Schools in London have improved at a greater rate than the schools in the rest of the country by a significant number at primary and secondary level and the gap between London students eligible for free school meals and the rest narrowed more rapidly than elsewhere. This is a great success story.

Central to the transformation was the work of London Challenge - but other reforms also contributed such as Teach First and the work of the best academies and the best local authorities. London Challenge pioneered the essential concept that school leaders have a real, shared moral responsibility for the wellbeing and educational attainment of young people not only in their own schools, but as part of a collective pact between school leaders at a local level and across London.

Developments in London moved the thinking forward about 'sector led improvement' and the role of school leaders as system leaders and of course this was picked up strongly and developed further by the National College for School Leadership.

Nowadays, system leadership and school to school collaboration is a concept that is increasingly embedded in our ways of working. It has moved far beyond London to many other parts of the country – from small primaries in rural Lincolnshire working collaboratively to become more sustainable, to places such as Greater Manchester where schools are committed to supporting each other. There are now over 1,000 NLEs and from a standing start in 2010, there are already 549 Teaching Schools across 450 alliances. I know that the Teaching Schools Council is committed to

driving forward this school-led system and I am delighted that ASCL is launching this week a major inquiry on what does a self-improving school-led system look like?.

Personally I think that the system can go one of two ways over the next few years.

What we could see is either more fragmentation and more tension between schools or we could see a further significant shift towards robust and meaningful collaboration.

But let me be controversial here. As far as I can see there are broadly two types of collaboration between schools at the moment. The first is hard-edged multi-academy trusts. They have quite a good track record of effectiveness, though the quality of some is patchy and some of the bigger ones are over-stretched. But at least accountability is clear in these trusts and everyone knows where they stand. The other main kind of collaboration across schools in England is a loose collaboration or network where schools want to work together to share practice and to learn from each other. Many of these networks do good things and serve an important purpose. They plan professional development, they share ideas and they visit each other's schools. But the danger of this second type of collaboration is that it may not be hard-edged enough, the difficult conversations about performance don't take place, the focus is not challenging enough and insufficiently based on outcomes – it is a club where if it gets uncomfortable anyone can just leave. There are some really good networks but there is a danger here that in some cases there may be lots of warm activity but very little effect. So my controversial bit is why does this have to be either or? Why are multi-academy trusts the only solution? Why can't it be possible to have hard-edged, formal collaboration that is outcome-focused and holds each school to account but is also inclusive and collaborative – that does not require the schools to become academies but that does require a formal agreement from governors that they will not walk away and which also builds into the process high challenge as well as support?

I do think that the work some schools are engaging in around peer review and moderation is extremely powerful in terms of facing up to the brutal facts about weaknesses in our organisations as well as strengths. Challenge Partners are a good example of this, as is the Bradford Schools Partnership and, of course, the important ASPIRE initiative which is organised by the NAHT.

I have mentioned some of the challenges of my new role at CfBT but one of the really exciting parts is that in the UK we are trialling a new collaborative approach to school improvement which, amongst other things, involves self-evaluation, moderated peer review, and some joint professional development across each school partnership. It is led by schools themselves – school leaders who are determined to get on the front foot and to develop the right strategies for the future rather than just rely on the strategies that have served them well in the past.

What excites me about this initiative is that it is not just based on the inspection framework but on research about great teaching and exceptional schools. It is genuinely developmental but it is also hard-edged and robust and enables the difficult conversations to take place. There is a focus on accountability but also,

crucially, on capacity building. And there is a commitment to collaboration, coherence and moral purpose rather than isolationism and fragmentation.
It is learning-centred leadership in action.

In England, we have the opportunity as a profession to be more ambitious than ever before.

When you walk into Sanctuary Buildings you see the photographs of education secretaries of old.

Some of the names are familiar, others are less so.
For all of us in education we have become used to defining change and defining progress by the name of Secretary of State in power at the time.
We talk about the:

Slide 25: (photo of the 4 Secretaries of State)

Butler reforms
Baker reforms
Blunkett reforms
And the current Secretary of State is one of the most radical and reforming education ministers we have ever had.

However, with more autonomy, collaboration and self-regulation we have an opportunity to change the fact that educational progress and reform is so associated with, and dependent upon, the politicians of the day. It is less the case in the legal profession and the medical profession and it is time it was less so in education. Governments have an extremely important role to play in education but on aspects such as pedagogy and school leadership it is for us – as a learning-centred profession - to be the pioneers and to best prepare our system and our children for a future we haven't seen yet.

That will mean some difficult conversations about performance amongst ourselves. We will need to embrace evidence-based approaches to education and engage in serious discussion and evaluation about what actually improves outcomes for children rather than what we think might work or what we would like to work. We will need to welcome professional challenge and be positive about being held to account for how well we meet the educational needs of our young people and our communities. It will mean embracing autonomy and collective responsibility in equal measure and, in particular, committing ourselves to achieving high standards for all rather than just high standards for our own school. Most of all it will mean committing ourselves to providing inspirational teaching and inspirational leadership rather than merely responding to regulatory control.

The question for all of us is can we succeed in shaping such an education system for ourselves and for the next generation to inherit? This is where the depth of our optimism and belief in what is possible really matters….

Colleagues, the system leadership challenge is not just for England or even for the UK –it is a global challenge.

How are we – the leaders of the profession - ensuring that we shape an education system that improves all children's learning – wherever they live or go to school?

We heard yesterday the moving story from Dr. Tererai Trent about the important work that she and her colleagues are doing in Zimbabwe.

And, since we are here in Birmingham where she is now being educated, it is fitting to pay tribute to the remarkable Malala Yousafzai.

Slide 26 – (photo of Malala)

She showed extraordinary courage when confronted by the Taliban gunmen who tried to kill her. On being asked how she coped with the fear that she might be again the victim of an assassination attempt. She said:

Slide 27 – (Malala quote)

"*I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly. Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is our basic right*"

Malala is a great advocate for the right of all children- regardless of gender, social background or disability- to get a school education. This is essential but it is only the beginning. In Pakistan and across the developing world many of those children who do go to school typically achieve pitiful learning outcomes. There is a need to move the discourse on from ensuring **access** to guaranteeing **success**. That requires great teaching and great leadership.

Last October I visited a non-formal primary school in the slums of Nairobi. Here amongst the rotting vegetables, the narrow dirt tracks and the corrugated iron shacks was a tiny school in a space not much bigger than an average classroom in the UK. There were 250 children crowded into tiny run-down wooden huts. There, in one of those classrooms, I watched an unqualified teacher, coached by someone from CfBT, give a good lesson to 20 enthusiastic children thirsty for learning. Here they are:

Slide 28 – (Photo of children)

Without education, these children have no real hope but they are having their life opportunities transformed through going to school. None of their family has ever been to school but here they are as enthusiastic learners. It is not just in the slums of Nairobi that teaching is making a difference.

All over the world children are learning because of the dedication and commitment and professionalism of teachers and leaders. We in this hall are part of the same profession as these teachers and leaders globally- we are committed to the same noble cause.

As teachers and leaders we are dealers in hope for the children in our care. For many we are the best hope they have got.

As I was driving through Nairobi on that same visit in October I saw a sign for the name of a school. It was called

Slide 29 – "Soon Big Brain Academy"

That is about hope. I am thinking of changing the name of CfBT to "Soon Big Brain Education Trust". Learning-centred leaders are leaders in hope and show unwarranted optimism, even in challenging contexts.

Finally, I want to talk about the system and the culture that we leave for the next generation of leaders and teachers.

Slide 30 – (All Blacks photos)

In the book "Legacy", a study of leadership based upon the experience of the All Blacks rugby team, James Kerr explains that at its core, there is an understanding that being an All Black is much more important than you as an individual. It is about what you inherit and then pass on. The All Black jersey doesn't belong to you. You earn the right to wear it with honour and integrity for a while but then your role as an All Black is to leave the jersey in a better place.

Last year my father died and I was able to make a speech at his funeral about the powerful impact he had on me and the commitment to others in general and to young people in particular that he had modelled throughout his life. But why do we have to wait until people have died before we reflect on the impact of their lives? Leadership is a scary privilege because it enables us to make so much difference - for good or ill - to the lives of those around us. So it is important to consider **now** what we hope will be our impact on the lives of others – the children, the young people and the adults- when we move on from our current role. Looking back, how will what we have done have enabled those we have led to be successful and happy? How will they remember us and what will we have modelled for them that will have a positive impact on their future lives? Clayton Christensen says:

Slide 31 – (Clayton Christensen quote)

"*Don't worry about the level of individual prominence you have achieved; worry about the individuals you have helped to become better people"* Clayton M Christensen

I think it is time for us as learning-centred leaders to renew our relentless pursuit of the goal that **every** child and young person in our care should be a powerful learner. It is time to renew our commitment to lead our organisations in such a way that our staff feel developed, challenged, empowered and supported. It is time in our own leadership to make sure that we have banished complacency and instead that we are leading with joy, knowing that feeling positive is a skill that we can develop and that as leaders we can walk into the wind. It is time to lead the change not just in our own organisation but across the system, to be part of something bigger – an education community committed to access and quality education for all. And it is time to make sure that we are stewards of the future – taking responsibility for

passing something worthwhile onto the next generation of teachers and leaders. Colleagues, it is time for inspirational learning-centred leadership.

ENDS