

# The educators who meet the gold standard

Key speakers from this week's Education Reform Summit explain how they've adeptly tackled poor performance in their schools. By **LUCY HODGES**

When Dame Sally Coates assumed the headship of Burlington Danes Academy in west London six years ago, she took over a rough school with serious weaknesses and where gangs were part of the culture.

Today she runs a school that is deemed outstanding by Ofsted on the four measures of achievement, behaviour, leadership and quality of teaching. It has been a spectacular achievement. And one which she has been sharing at this week's Education Reform summit in London. So how has she done it?

The answer lies partly in the fact that she runs an academy school, she thinks, especially an academy sponsored by the Ark, the international charity that aims to close the achievement gap between rich and poor children.

She was sympathetic to Labour's educational reform agenda just as she endorses much of the Coalition's efforts to improve pupil performance by extending academies, state-funded schools directly funded by central government but independent of local authority control.

"Local authorities have a lot of things to do such as look after roads, housing and children's services – and education is just one of their areas of concern," she explains.

"Even good local authorities find it hard to run their schools in the way that the sponsors of academies do. All Ark does is to look after their schools, so there is a real focus on what is going on in terms of school improvement. They can intervene very quickly if things go wrong."

Opened by Lord Adonis in 2006, during the Blair government, Burlington Danes has gone from around only 30 per cent of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A\* to C to having 77 per cent meeting that gold standard today.

"I am a supporter of the Education Secretary Michael Gove," she says. "I do think that he has raised standards. What the Government has done in making things more rigorous has been really good for education as a whole as well as for this country."

One of the important things Ark did was to appoint Sally Coates as head teacher. For any school to succeed, it is key to have a good head, according to the experts. At the time she was running Sacred Heart in Southwark, a school which she turned around.

Within a few months she was tackling all the major structural problems at Burlington Danes – in particular, pupil behaviour and poor teaching.

"You have to sort out behaviour before you can sort out achievement," she says. "A brilliant teacher can't do anything until the children behave and want to learn."

A reform she introduced, beloved by Mr Gove, was to publish a rank order of children's exam results. This is now done three times a year. That means that children are publicly scored and have their names put up on a board to show how they have performed against one another in every subject.

"Children realised that there was no hiding place. They had to start working because their results were going to be made public," she says. "That transformed behaviour."

Dame Rachel de Souza, who will also be talking at the summit, is another reformer in the same mould as Dame Sally. She has been working her magic on the education scene in Norfolk as chief executive of Inspiration Trust, a federation of academies and free schools in that county, and is trying to tackle the seemingly intractable problem of poor standards in Norfolk.

Like Dame Sally, she cut her teeth transforming a school, Barnfield West Academy in Luton, which became the most improved school in the country at that time. When Rachel de Souza took it over, only 16 per cent of children were achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE and it had dire staff shortages.

She set about sorting out behaviour problems, in particular the gang culture (her first pupil exclusion was for a gun crime), hiring decent teachers and instilling a sense of pride in the

school. Within a year, 47 per cent of pupils were getting five A\*-C grades.

Like Dame Sally, she sees the sponsorship aspect of the academy policy as essential. "The sponsors who take on the school truly believe that it will succeed and not fail," she says.

After Barnfield West Academy, Rachel de Souza sought a new challenge, this time in Norfolk where she assumed the headship of the then failing Costessey High School in Norwich, which teachers described as having a "wild west" feel to it. Teachers were planning lessons they were unable to deliver and exam results were on the slide – down to 23 per cent achieving grades A\* to C.

That came after the loss of almost one-half of the school's teaching staff, in a crisis following the jailing of the former deputy head for sexual offences and the school was placed in special measures.

Within a year she had turned it into the thriving Victory Academy, run by the Ormiston academy chain. She attributes that to an immediate emphasis on behaviour, an "absolute attention to detail" and getting students involved, including training some to take part in lesson observation.

"I promoted the staff that were already there and that really won hearts and minds," she says. "It's been a team effort and they have been part of it. It's not been done to them."

After three years of that, Dame Rachel felt that the county needed a Norfolk-wide solution to improving educational standards, so, with others,



Norfolk's Costessey High School has turned into the thriving Victory Academy  
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she established the Inspiration Trust, a federation of free schools and academies that can share resources.

Among her first and most exciting tasks was to set up two new schools. Both are free schools, independent and state-funded institutions not controlled by a local authority.

Like Dame Sally, and unlike much of the teaching profession, she is a fan of Mr Gove's reforms. "I think when we look back he will be seen as one of the great education reformers," she says.

Dame Rachel is very keen to look outwards and to form partnerships with other schools and other countries. The sign of a successful institution is one that is confident and outward-looking, she believes. The same can be said of another speaker, Derek

Trimmer, head of Hove Park School in East Sussex, which has seen a massive rise in exam results since he was appointed in April 2011.

His school formed a partnership with Perry Beeches free school in Birmingham, which lends its literacy expertise in the form of six literacy coaches to Hove Park. In return, Hove Park gives Perry Beeches help with using technology to improve pedagogy and practice. It has also formed another partnership with School 21, the free school in Newham run by Tony Blair's former adviser Peter Hymn, as well as with schools in Shanghai and Barcelona.

"Partnerships benchmark your progress against the best schools," says Trimmer. They are also part of the Government's reform agenda. A school cannot achieve an outstanding grade in an Ofsted judgment without a partnership. "The days of stand-alone schools competing against one another have gone," says Trimmer. "Only by working together can you ensure that all children benefit."

When he took over in 2011, Hove Park was in a poor state with only 27 per cent achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE. By 2013, the proportion had climbed to 65 per cent. He now runs a school that has an international reputation for using technology to improve pedagogy and practice in the classroom, and has been in the top 1 per cent of most improved schools in the country for the past two years.

It is not just the British who have been discussing reform at the Education Summit. Another speaker is Lucia Figar, Minister of Education in Madrid, who has been talking about the changes introduced in the Spanish capital since 2004, including accountability and autonomy of schools.

Spain had no external evaluation of schools and no public exams, so Madrid introduced testing at key stages, the only region in Spain to do such a thing. It met with opposition from teachers' unions but now is accepted, she says.

"We make public the results on a website, which has millions of visits. Parents can see the evolution of schools and can compare schools."

Madrid's government believes that accountability and autonomy go together and is now giving schools the freedom to deviate from the prescribed curriculum and timetabling schedule, followed by all areas of Spain. "About one-half of schools in Madrid are choosing to do their own thing," she says. "This model has

really improved the results of the students in the capital."

The Netherlands has also been pursuing a reform route with a difference – investing in teacher quality while insisting on more accountability. New tests are being introduced at the end of primary school at age 12. At the same time money is being invested in the teaching force, so the professionals become more expert and gain higher degrees.

"Accountability is very helpful," says Sander Dekker, Minister for Education in the Netherlands. "My feeling is that some schools up to now have been able to act in isolation. In order to become better they need to talk to other teachers in other schools, so that they learn from one another."

## MAKING SCIENCE COOL

### "Only 300 are doing physics A-level"



So concerned was Dame Rachel de Souza (above) at how few maths and science specialists were being produced by Norfolk secondary schools that she strived for change.

It appalled her that there were big firms in the county keen to hire science and maths experts but there was no pipeline locally. Most children were being taught in small sixth forms, and performance was below average across the county.

"There are something like 5,000 sixth formers in Norfolk of whom only 300 are doing physics A-level, and only 0.2 per cent of those are girls," she says.

The result is the Sir Isaac Newton sixth-form college, a free school that opens in September 2014.

All students will study maths and at least two other subjects with a mathematical or science flavour. The aim is to create a culture in which it is "cool" to want to become a scientist.

## Comment Ian Fordham & Ty Goddard



*It's time to start building a pragmatic and positive movement for reform*

Billions of pounds, millions of children and young people, hundreds of thousands of communities, thousands of schools, colleges, universities and other learning settings.

We can all cite examples of educational triumph and educational tragedy. We've been educating children for hundreds of years.

There's much to be proud of and to celebrate. We have an education system full of national treasures, a committed and vibrant teaching profession and real-life examples of how the system can be changed to improve learning.

Recent years have seen changes to our education system, which give real hope that standards in our schools are being raised for thousands of children; and that positive change will endure.

But there are still some fundamentals, which we need to address. There are still major gaps in opportunity, achievement and skills for children and young people.

We now know more about how to tackle those challenges from our own and other successful education systems from around the world. We need as a nation to begin a conversation about education reform and find a way to bridge those gaps, so all children and young people have the chance to realise their potential.

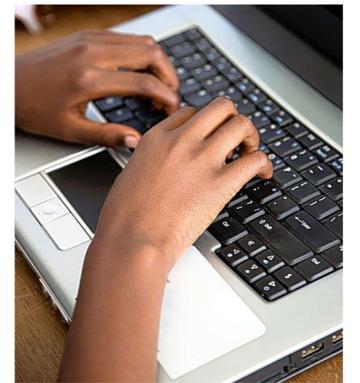
We need to ask ourselves the difficult questions, and work together on the solutions. "What works?" must be a constant prompt, alongside "Where next?". We should draw on lessons from education systems around the world, as well as the many examples of brilliant practice from here in the UK.

We have to start building a pragmatic and positive movement for reform that questions some of the fundamentals of how we deliver education and how we benefit every young person in the future.

What we do have is a real appetite for change, and a generation of teachers and education leaders who are already changing our education system from the ground up. Innovation has been a driving force for them, as has the white heat of technology, which is already enabling people to work together in powerful new ways. Technology is transforming our education system, and the digital revolution will continue to be central to reform in the future.

But that's not all. We also have a summit of education leaders who agree the time is right to develop a British education reform movement. A radical summit that creates a legacy in the form of a powerful cross-sector group of "education reform advocates", who can work across the country to support future reformers in their work at grassroots level. And a movement that garners support and views from all of those with a stake in education to be ambitious about our future.

We make no apology for being radical. It's radical because the reform movement that



will follow will be increasingly cross sector and non-partisan and led by educators, from leaders of teaching schools, from colleges and academy chains and from forward-thinking city and regional leaders.

And it's radical because we have new opportunities and approaches springing from the resources, connections and ideas that are part of the new digital age we live in.

This is what the Education Foundation is about. We have always been clear that nothing short of education reform is going to generate the transformation we need to see in our education system. With such a long history, it's inevitable that there will be disagreements about where we need to be and the best way to get there. But that doesn't make it an impossible task, nor does it negate the potential for positive change.

We are at a crossroads. This is not just about our children and young people, nor the resources required to run our education system, important though those things are. It is about the future of our society, as we make our way in this rapidly changing and global reality that we live in. We have to meet the needs of those who use our education system, while catering for the requirements of new and developing business areas, demanding academia and traditional places of work.

The time has come. It's time for a new ambition for all of our children and young people.

*Ian Fordham and Ty Goddard are the co-founders of The Education Foundation. [ednfdoundation.org](http://ednfdoundation.org)*



## MINI IPADS FOR ALL

### "I was worried that this might be gimmicky, but it is not"

By early 2013 head teacher Derek Trimmer (right) had turned around Hove Park School in East Sussex, but he wanted to do more.



"I was looking for something that would encourage reluctant learners and enable better contact between home and school," he says. "We didn't have the money to get wonderful new open spaces that would transform learning."

So, this unprepossessing-looking split-site school came up with the idea of giving all 1,600 children a mini iPad. Parents were encouraged to buy an iPad for their children through easy-payment terms and those who didn't want to or couldn't buy the iPad were given or lent one. The result has been spectacular.

Maths lessons, for example, are taught on the iPad. When children answer questions on the iPad they receive feedback very fast and the teacher can see who understands the topic.

"If they get feedback straightaway, their learning is much deeper," says Trimmer. "I was worried that this might be gimmicky, but it is not. Students are doing a lot of teaching themselves and working together – and building on the collective experience. We are seeing something quite incredible."

The head teacher is also confident that this will have a big effect on Year 11 pupils (the GCSE year) because it is changing the way children learn for the better.

"I have been teaching for 27 years and the impact this has had with Year 11 (ages 15 and 16) has been more significant than anything I have ever seen," says Trimmer. "Their all-round learning experience is much deeper."