



Confederation
of School Trusts

#TrulyCivic

Address to CST 2022 Annual Conference

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#TrulyCivic – June 2022

Good morning colleagues and welcome to CST's annual conference. Can I thank the excellent musicians from Ormiston Academies Trust City of Norwich School. I wanted to start the conference with a reminder of the power of making music together, the drum beat that speeds up the heart, the heartbeat of what we do and why we do it.

Thank you for the many kind messages you've sent us through this, another challenging year. We've appreciated these immensely. It has been our privilege to support and represent you.

And we know there are many challenges at the forefront of your minds, as you told us in response to the survey we conducted with our Platinum Partner Edurio earlier this year. I'm delighted that today, we have published The National CST School Trust Report, which explores those responses and shows that, yes, there are challenges, but there are also many amazing opportunities ahead.

I'd like to thank Edurio and our other brilliant partners who have been such a strong source of support over the past year and who are all here with us at conference. And my wonderful staff who have made this conference possible. Thank you. I would also like to take a moment to thank CST's brilliant board of trustees who give so generously of their time and expertise.

I could talk to you at this conference about White Papers and Green Papers and School Bills – after all, it is a conference which is in no small part about the policy environment in which we are located - but today, I want to talk about a broader and more ambitious narrative arc - about the Trust as a civic structure with the sole purpose of advancing education for public benefit. I want to talk to you about three themes of #TrulyCivic: compassion, connectedness and reflection.

Truly Compassionate

First of all, let's explore what it might mean to be truly compassionate. At last year's conference, I spoke to you of the civic roles that you have expertly performed during the pandemic. I said:

“However hard this has been (and it has been very difficult for so much of the time), you have never stopped, not once, to put yourselves first. At every moment, you have done your civic duty.

“Despite times when there has been a lack of clarity or when there has been contradictory information, and the rapid changes in policy, school and trust leaders and their boards have been determined to make sense of it.

“You have done this because you believe in the power of education to improve lives – and indeed to change the world.”

Today, I want to look at this through a different lens – A duty of care.

I recently read the wonderful book by the same name from Professor Peter Hennessey. This book argues that what defined us in the post-war period was our sense of a Duty of Care. This was the basis





of the great reforms outlined in Beveridge Report of 1942 which in turn resulted in the great pillars of the Welfare State.

We have rediscovered an *intense* duty of care through the pandemic. Hennessey refers to the Covid enquiry and suggests that their report should be called: “‘It took a Virus...’ for this is what stimulated us collectively to sharpen and extend our sense of a duty of care for the vulnerable and those who are on the margins of society.”

It may not be possible to enshrine into law the kindness we encountered – the kindness you showed to the children in your care and their families – but it is possible to choose to live by that kindness.

Professor Hennessey goes on to say that this concept of a duty of care should again define us as we learn how to live in a post-pandemic world with such political, economic, and social uncertainty. I wish for this to be the basis of a new social contract with government and more widely with our parliamentary democracy.

Hennessey says: “The great question of UK politics ... is whether we can find the pessimism-breaking policies, the people, the purpose, the language, and the optimism to shift [our current] system and replace it with something much closer to who we are and, above all, who we can be.”

But we do not need to wait for this political settlement – it is within our gift to find the people, the purpose, the language, and the optimism to shift our mental models, to see education as the building of who we can be.

Colleagues, I say to you today: we can do this.

Truly Connected

Now to move the second of our three themes – truly connected. Compassion and care are cornerstones of what we do as professionals. They are absolutely necessary, but perhaps not sufficient. We must build a system based on connectedness. I want to explore this in two ways:

- First of all, by creating the conditions in our schools for belonging and human flourishing – the conditions in which all children and staff feel connected and valued.
- The second is about institutional connectedness.

Owen Eastwood in his book on Belonging, which he calls an Ancient Code of Togetherness, speaks of the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels like they belong, regardless of who they are and what they believe. You will hear from him tomorrow, but I wanted to cite this concept because it is so important to the school cultures we create.

I want to pay tribute here to two teachers, leaders and writers who I think are making a fundamental contribution to our thinking on education, Tom Rees and Ben Newmark. In a recent [blog](#), they explore as parents, how we can move towards a more affirmatory conception of special educational needs and disabilities. This is framed as a response to the Green Paper, but it is much more vital to our mental models than a policy document.





Tom and Ben say: “If we are to take this opportunity as society to think again about the place for those with special educational needs and disabilities, we have to be able to make a fuller and more inclusive articulation of what a good life is, and what it could be.”

This is about dignity and belonging. And it is absolutely *still* the value we place on work and learning. Human flourishing is *both* the optimal continuing development of children’s potential (the substance of education, the value of knowledge) *and* living well as a human being. It is about living well in our communities and societies, but also on our planet, as a global citizen and to this end I am proud that we are sharing with you the work of Lyfta – the power of stories to connect us to each other.

I want to turn now to institutional connectedness. But first I want to say a word about the importance of strong institutions. It is easy to say we do not care about structures – we care first and foremost about what goes on in classrooms. But colleagues, I tell you now what you already know: teachers teach in structures. Children learn in structures. Structures matter.

Groups of schools working together in deeply connected ways as part of a single entity are at the heart of the future of our education system. They allow for the purposeful collaboration between schools which can help our education system become the best system at getting better.

This is illustrated by CST’s simple theory of change – as Ian Bauckham CBE and I set out in our paper on [trusts as knowledge building institutions](#):

- Our goal is for every teacher in every classroom to be as good as they can be in what they teach (the curriculum) and how they teach (pedagogy).
- For this to happen, we need to mobilise for every teacher the best evidence from research.
- There is no improvement for pupils without improvement in teaching, and no improvement in teaching without the best professional development for teachers.
- Strong structures (in groups of schools) can facilitate better professional development and thus better teaching and improvement for pupils because as [Jen Barker and Katy Patten argue](#) they have the capacity and can control the culture and conditions to make this happen.

As Steve Rollett argues, School Trusts are [Communities of Improvement](#). At their best, they are agile, dynamic organisations that can [integrate knowledge and practice](#) across subject communities and groups of schools. This is born from the spirit of connectedness, of collaboration, of solidarity. And I believe that we will show the world that this beautiful experiment in deep and purposeful collaboration will make us the best system at getting better.

The group of schools working together creates educational value but also makes good economic sense. As we face an uncertain fiscal future with unprecedented pressures on the public purse from global events, it was never more important that we have robust institutions that can withstand further perturbations.

But we also need stronger *national institutional architecture* in education which is less mature than that of the more established professions, and is in the process of being built and understood. This is why it is my pleasure to welcome the National Institute of Teaching.





And this is why nearly four years ago, CST was born as your sector body - to contribute to a strong institutional architecture and to create the conditions for connectedness; to harness the moral purpose that binds us together in a greater common good.

It is of course also why we are making the case for the Trust as a civic structure – to work more widely with other civic actors to ensure coherent public services for our children, families and communities.

Let's return to Peter Hennessey for a moment. He says: "We have *sovereignty* over our duty of care – how we express it in language, deed, and policy. It is a matter of *shared* purpose and sustained application. Above all, it is a question of spirit that casts aside pessimism."

If we are to achieve this, it will require us to invest in the hard work of consensus building, focusing less on what it is that makes us different and on issues that can divide us.

So, let us exercise our sovereignty as institutions, *but bind together in a common purpose*. Let us build strong educational institutions that address the inequalities and hardships we face as a society and as a nation. But let those institutions work together in a single moral purpose – to advance education for public benefit – and to create social value for wider common good.

Colleagues, I say to you today: we can do this.

We are indeed a family of trusts.

Truly Reflective

Now I want to turn to the third of our three themes – truly reflective. I want to reflect on our shared histories and those histories that are too often ignored. It is wonderful to have with us David Olusoga OBE who will undoubtedly explore these themes tomorrow.

A core part of what it means to be a professional is to reflect, and it is incumbent on us to reflect and be responsive to the wider social, economic, and political realities that define our time. Reflection is not an armchair activity – it involves analytical thought but also agency and action. How do we respond to widening gaps in educational attainment, to the terrible cost of child and family poverty, to worsening mental health and wider injustices and inequalities that are a feature of our modern lives?

I'd like to draw your attention to a beautiful paper by another two teachers and leaders who continue to astonish me with their bold thoughts and deeds and to challenge received wisdom: Funmilola Stewart and Jenny Thompson. They say in their paper on [Powerful Knowledge as Social Justice](#):

"Social justice through education is more than affording our children a seat at the establishment table – it is the imbuing of knowledge and permission and self-determination to flip it once there. Social justice is not an advanced ticket to the establishment - it is the release of the *visceral will to re-establish it*.

"Social justice in education involves a commitment to challenging the social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals because of differential distribution of power, resources, and





privilege. The application and delivery of powerful knowledge within schools is recognised as a tool for social justice but, for this to be truly consequential, our focus must shift from a broad consideration of the disparities between the elite and the disadvantaged, and towards an acknowledgement of the intersectionality underpinning social disadvantage.”

We are privileged in England I think to have such thoughtful, articulate, and reflective teachers and leaders and I am delighted that Funmi will join the panel with David Olusoga tomorrow.

So, let us reflect on the great issues of our day. Let us lead as public intellectuals with an understanding of our educational history and with the sharp intellect that seeks to cut deep into inequalities and social injustices in the fabric of our society. Let us lead with kindness, compassion, and a duty of care.

Colleagues, I say to you today: we can do this.

We are indeed a family of trusts.

We will do this together. And CST will be here with you the whole way.

“My wish for you is that you continue...”

I’ll finish with some extracts of a poem by Maya Angelou which reminds us of our duty of care, our role as trust and civic leaders to be compassionate, connected, and reflective. The role of education to elevate all, not just the few, in the democracy that knowledge brings – the mobilisation of education as a force for human flourishing and social justice.

My wish for you

Is that you continue

Continue

To be who and how you are

To astonish a mean world

With your acts of kindness

...

Continue

To let your eloquence

Elevate the people to heights

They had only imagined





Continue

To remind the people that

Each is as good as the other

And that no one is beneath

Nor above you

Continue

To remember your own young years

And look with favor upon the lost

And the least and the lonely

Continue

To put the mantel of your protection

Around the bodies of

The young and defenseless

Continue

To plant a public kiss of concern

On the cheek of the sick

And the aged and infirm

And count that as a

Natural action to be expected

Continue

To ignore no vision

Which comes to enlarge your range





And increase your spirit

Continue

To dare to love deeply

And risk everything

For the good thing

Continue

And by doing so

You and your work

Will be able to continue

Eternally

Despite the extraordinary challenges we face, you will continue because you believe in the power of education to improve lives – and change the world.

Thank you.

