

## High Performance Learning

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July 2021

When 'Room at the Top' was published in 2011, its sub-title 'inclusive education for high performance' ran counter to many prevailing orthodoxies. And this was a few years before British Ministers set off for the Far East to return with tales of mastery.

In this seminal book, author Deborah Eyre set out a number of key recommendations including the abolition of an accountability system ('floor targets' and the rest) which inherently depressed expectations. That same system exists today, albeit on pause through the Covid era. And I have written elsewhere about the way in which 'the forgotten third' is baked into the UK system:

[The Forgotten Third](#)

Two of the most significant, long-running and unresolved debates in education across the globe are firstly, the issue of how to raise the performance of an education system; and secondly, how to support the most able within the system. Eyre argues that for the most part these debates have been conducted in isolation.

The system performance debate has generated endless discussion about the relative importance of school structures, the quality of teachers, inspection frameworks and curricula. The gifted education debate has focused on how to identify and educate a fixed and relatively small cohort with a special gift – the ability to achieve advanced levels of cognitive performance.

Eyre concludes in 'Room at the Top' that this debate largely ignores the one thing that is present in *all* high performing education systems: significant numbers of high performing pupils, way more than educators commonly think.

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Fast forward a decade and over 100 schools across the globe root their organisation structures, values and expectations in [High Performance Learning](#) (HPL)

Professor Eyre and colleagues have curated a network of schools - across 23 countries - which are as individually diverse as they are collectively committed to the HPL seven pillars of high performance. Theirs is a movement for change, within their own schools and reaching out to a wider canvas.

At their second annual conference held in-person at Warwick University at the end of June, schools with 'low attainment on entry' (as the dreadful inspection language in England goes, and rightly refuted by HPL) shared the same ambitions for their children as those schools with highly selective intakes: from Basingstoke to Bangkok, Wakefield to Abu Dhabi, Penzance to Panama.

Teachers and leaders from these primary, secondary and all-through schools believe fundamentally that almost all youngsters *can* achieve as confident global citizens, advanced performers and enterprising learners – if systems and teachers believe in them.

*High Performance Learning* offers a framework for government, state, private, international schools of all denominations to prove that there really is 'room at the top' if we systematically nurture more children to get there. Interestingly, the first adopters of HPL in Dubai were the top end GEMS schools. Latterly, it is in the low-fee international schools which serve migrant workers' children that HPL is taking root.

Just maybe - with a pause in our accountability system which builds in low expectations for too many children and young people – there is a door ajar to demonstrate that advanced levels of cognitive performance are not the province of the few, but of the many.

*Roy Blatchford is an Honorary Fellow of HPL. His latest book is '[The Three Minute Leader](#)'.*