

Buckets and Spades

What is on your Bucket List, if you have one? According to Collins Dictionary online, “Your bucket list consists of all the things you would really like to do or see in your life”. In a recent announcement from Damian Hinds, Education Secretary, children should be urged to climb trees, watch a sunrise, learn to knit and start a vegetable patch. In a stark departure from the views of previous post holder Michael Gove, Hinds views resilience and character in a child’s education on a par with academic success.

He intends to publish a “bucket list” of life goals that school children will be encouraged to achieve every year before they leave primary school in the Maintained Sector. Under the policy, schools will be given a list of milestones that children will be encouraged to tick off as they progress through their primary years. “Qualifications are obviously not the only thing, and I tend to think the difference is everything you can’t write on a certificate - drive, tenacity, sticking with the task at hand. And being able to bounce back from the knocks that inevitably come to all of us,” said Mr Hinds.

He is, of course, suggesting that there is more to education than simply the subjects studied in a traditional timetable. He is, of course, also reflecting the value that PSB puts on the skills associated with leadership, collaboration, communication and independence, skills that Yateley Manor has held at the centre of its curriculum for some years now. I have spoken to a number of parents in recent years who have been compelled to travel beyond the shores of the UK to recruit staff with the correct skill set, not the qualifications but the underlying character required; the resilience, the ability to communicate effectively and the capacity to operate in a team, for example.



So what do people place on their Bucket Lists? The Top 10 Bucket List activities, according to ‘bucketlist.net’, are as follows:

1. See the Northern Lights
2. Sky dive
3. Get a tattoo
4. Go on a cruise
5. Swim with dolphins
6. Get married
7. Go scuba diving
8. Run a marathon
9. Go zip-wiring
10. Ride an elephant

These are aspirations, hopes or ambitions to achieve something. I asked a number of children at Yateley Manor for activities that they would like to achieve in their lives. The following responses from the children demonstrate clear aspirations or ambitions:

1. Play a game of football at Wembley
2. Swim the English Channel
3. Go up the Empire State Building
4. Play the violin at the Royal Albert Hall
5. Drive a Ferrari

Motivation, aspiration and ambition are complex psychological processes that cannot be enhanced just because a teacher or parent demands it. Ambition must come from inside you. It is not poured into you, it is not taught by a wise elder. It is the answer to the question: “What are you doing with life itself today?” That is why I question the merit of providing young children with a list of more expectations for their school career, another list to tick off. Children are individuals. We cannot and must not treat them all with the same expectations. What lights a child’s passion will not be the same as another. Certainly we can look to develop resilience, perseverance (and all the other qualities within our PSB curriculum) through opportunities but let us not expect every child should have the same ambition and be motivated by the same things. We will continue to explore ways to build resilience and other life skills through our PSB approach and have been talking this week about how that might reflect the Bucket List Passport, as Mr Hinds has suggested, but it will not be a shopping list of experiences that every child must tick off.

As for my Bucket List I am saddened in a way that I do not have a long list of activities which I need to achieve or experience in my life. Maybe I am simply fortunate to have had opportunities that have fulfilled me. Or perhaps it is because my motivation comes from an ultimate aim to live in a small house on the beach; to be able to open the curtains and lie in bed, watching the waves lap the shore, the wood burner still alight from the night before, drinking tea and eating Marmite on toast. That is the number one priority on my list!

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