

UNDERSTANDING MINERVA

A new educational approach to improving school life - for pupils and parents



LOUGHBOROUGH
Amherst School

The Minerva philosophy

“We’ve all heard about the ‘snowflake generation’, a misleading term that does a real disservice to our young people as a whole.

What is undeniably true, however, is that this generation of school children will enter a less predictable world of work; with lower social mobility and greater competition for jobs within a global market. They will also have to navigate a society in which mental health problems are on the rise.

With this in mind, we have recently developed a character education approach to encourage positive character traits in your child – helping them to develop habits that will help them professionally and personally during their education and throughout the rest of their lives. This new philosophy is called Minerva and its aim is simple: **to help young people prepare for a competitive world while remaining happy, healthy, balanced and kind.**

The ideas underpinning Minerva derive from our concern that the bland, simplistic platitudes of ‘you can be whoever you want to be’ are unhelpful and potentially counter-productive in that they actually place too much pressure on young people to be ‘super-human’ when they really need a more grounded and practical form of support. So I believe we need to be more measured and realistic in our encouragement of young people. Also, we need a pragmatic approach to ‘growth mindset’ (which simply means building the capacity for self-criticism, creativity and resilience) which looks at altering the environment in which young people learn rather than simply preaching to them.

The values of Minerva are now being consistently ingrained into our school’s culture and ways of working to provide a unique combination of nurture and challenge. It’s a wonderful opportunity to enhance our roles as both teachers and parents.

Most importantly, Minerva is designed to help your child in a variety of ways – from simply improving school grades to empowering them for life beyond our school gates.”

Dr Julian Murphy



Dr Julian Murphy is a graduate of the University of Oxford (DPhil in the area of Modern Islamic Thought) whose background is in Philosophy, with a special focus on religious and political thought. He was Director of Studies at Woldingham School in Surrey for eight years, before joining us as Headmaster in September 2016.



Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.

Winston Churchill

Six key ways Minerva makes a difference:

Route Maps

At the beginning of the year, every class receives a route map for their subject. This includes a calendar of learning tasks; times of key tests, and a list of the skills they will be seeking to develop. This is organisational common sense, but also provides pupils with a sense of control and ownership that is psychologically important.

Reports

Our reports are now more succinct with smarter targets that focus on the precise improvements required (as any working adult would expect from feedback). Effort grades are no longer included because we believe they are unhelpful and emotive - instead, we use six different 'approach to learning' grades for more targeted but less emotive feedback.

Revision

We have formalised the expectation that revision should take place throughout the year, often with gaps between the end of a unit and the unit test. This is known as 'spaced learning' and helps maximise retention of knowledge.

Homework

Where appropriate, instead of setting homework in the traditional way, we ask pupils to spend half their time reading and then the other half writing under exam conditions - so the homework task works more effectively. It helps to embed knowledge and apply it under exam conditions - and also means that teachers gain an accurate assessment of progress.



Teaching


In the classroom, we apply 'process' criticism and praise which means criticising or praising pupils' effort or approach rather than their final work. So assessment is based on attitude rather than fixed ability, which helps nurture growth mindset. In addition, we encourage pupils to go beyond simplistic correct answers by expressing themselves more fully. This helps children to think - and write - more articulately.

Exams

We've altered our timetables to bring internal exams in Year 10 and above forward - this allows more time for pupils to address potential issues during Year 11 and 13. Also, we now explicitly distinguish for all pupils between 'low stakes' and 'high stakes' tests. Because we believe that the true value of most exams is in gaining and sharing information on pupil progress.

It's fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.

Bill Gates



Ever tried. Ever failed.
No matter. Try again.
Fail again. Fail better.

Samuel Beckett

Our Minerva workshops

We want you to be part of the Minerva journey. That's why we're running special workshops to help - which include the following types of topics (exact dates to be announced)..

For pupils

- Effective exam techniques
- Sleep hygiene
- Understanding anxiety issues
- How to read effectively
- Reading for pleasure

For parents

- Helping with revision and homework
- Explaining growth mindsets
- Helpful parental interventions
- Helping with maths
- How to help dyslexic children learn at home



Minerva beyond the timetable

We are ambitious about taking the Minerva philosophy further into children's lives.

Our varied extra-curricular timetable offers lots of different activities which help every pupil to stretch and challenge themselves and discover new levels of focus and confidence, whatever their particular personality and interests. Activities such as debating, Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) society and visiting speakers challenge the mind and help build more articulate speakers and informed, holistic thinkers. While activities such as Combined Cadet Force or Eco Club challenge the whole person and build resilience, team work, social awareness and confidence.

From September 2021 our aim is to bring the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) (Level II) into our GCSE programme. This would introduce higher achievers to university-style work at the age of 15/16 - a new experience designed to stretch their intellectual capabilities.

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How Minerva works...

All our colleagues at the School have been considering the things we could do to help children improve their learning efficiency, happiness and results. When we searched for patterns, we discovered that Minerva could be used to help reduce anxiety about tests, make constructive criticism easier to handle, improve skills for extracting information from reading, and enhance the ability to work effectively.

Obstacles, of course, are developmentally necessary: they teach kids strategy, patience, critical thinking, resilience and resourcefulness.

Naomi Wolf





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Amherst School
Gray Street
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 2DZ

01509 263901
www.lsf.org/amherst