

MINERVA

Amherst's educational philosophy



LOUGHBOROUGH
Amherst School

Minerva educational philosophy

In an ever more complex world, our Minerva philosophy is designed to develop in our young people positive character traits and habits which will help them personally and professionally, while remaining happy, healthy, balanced and kind.

It is plain to see that successful learning outcomes depend on both high-quality teaching and hard work by the learner. Yet, even with both of these elements in place, learning can be less effective than it could be, or more stressful than it needs to be, if a school does not do all it can to promote a strong and healthy learning culture.

A successful learning culture depends on four key elements:

1. The learning environment
2. Knowledge and confidence
3. Nurturing a growth mindset
4. Precise verbal articulation of ideas

At Amherst, we want every child to fulfil their greatest potential. We help them to achieve this through our Minerva educational philosophy, named after the Roman goddess of wisdom. Minerva comprises a range of practical ways by which we apply the four elements of our learning culture to truly educate the whole person.

The Minerva learning culture underpins our integrated approach to the academic curriculum, personal development programme and co-curricular offer. It is predicated on a growth mindset; the belief that our abilities are largely the result of time, effort and practice. A growth mindset enables our pupils to embrace challenges, appreciate feedback and use failures as a means to learn.

The values of Minerva are consistently ingrained in our school's culture and ways of working to provide a unique combination of nurture and challenge.

Mr James Neville



1. The learning environment

We ensure our learning environment places high expectations on all learners, is focused and calm, warm, fun, encouraging and supportive.

2. Knowledge and confidence

Our curriculum is highly structured to focus on intrinsic cognitive load (the necessary information you need to learn). The curriculum is interleaved to ensure that knowledge is retained in the long-term. Pupils' knowledge is secure, thereby building confidence.

3. Nurturing a growth mindset

Over time, diligence, resilience, self-confidence and disciplined habits play a much greater part in success than any initial natural talent or intelligence. This is growth mindset. We work on the principle that pupils need to operate in an environment of habits, routines and expectations that simply encourage the development of smart and resilient working habits over time.

4. Precise verbal articulation of ideas

For an argument or idea to be convincing, it must first be clearly articulated. Therefore, we ensure pupils give answers that are not only valid, but full, clear and capable of being further discussed, evidenced and defended.





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

Winston Churchill

Six key ways Minerva is embedded in our everyday practice:

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 reassuring.

Reports

Our reports are succinct with smart targets that focus on the precise improvements required (as any working adult would expect from feedback). We provide opportunity for pupils to review and act on the targets set.

Revision

We explicitly teach how to revise (metacognition) and develop self-regulated learners. 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 'spaced learning' 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 (flipped learning) 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.

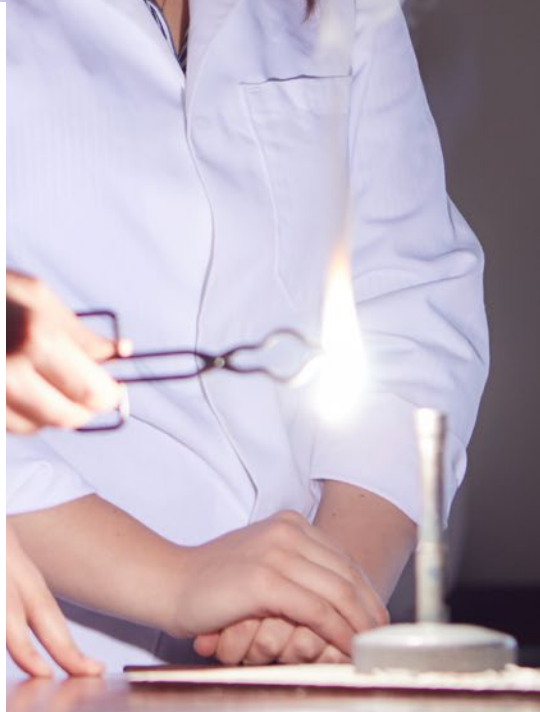


Teaching

In the classroom, we apply 'process' criticism and praise which means criticising or praising pupils' effort or approach rather than their final work. Therefore 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 parents to be part of the Minerva journey. That's why we run special workshops to help, including topic areas such as:

For pupils

- Effective exam techniques
- How to 'ace' your revision
- How to read effectively
- Sleep hygiene

For parents

- Introduction to ISAMs
- GCSE grading and APRCs explained
- Supporting your child with Mathematics
- Tips for effective language learning
- Supporting your child with GCSE Science
- Effective Revision Techniques
- An introduction to Personal Development
- Mental health and wellbeing



Minerva beyond the classroom

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

Our vibrant co-curricular programme provides stretch, challenge and fun for every pupil, whilst inspiring all-important confidence. Activities such as debating, Young Medics and visiting speakers challenge the mind and help build more articulate speakers and informed, holistic thinkers, while activities such as Combined Cadet Force or Environment Society challenge the whole person and build resilience, team work, social awareness and confidence.

To provide extra challenge for our more able pupils, members of HAPPs (Higher Academic Potential Pupils) benefit from regular stretch and challenge opportunities and complete an Individual Academic Project which prepares pupils to be independent learners.

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

Naomi Wolf



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